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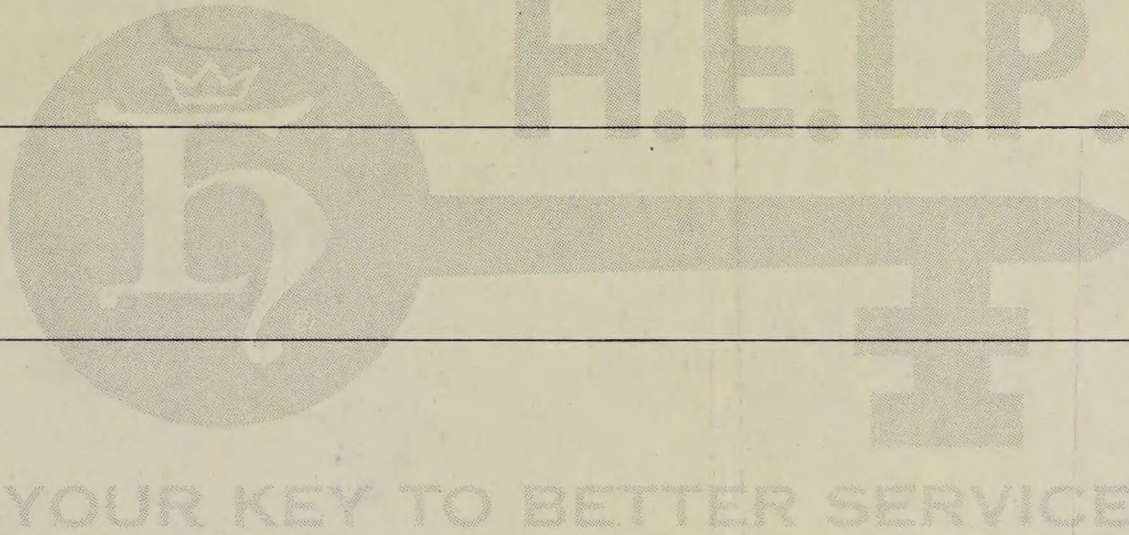
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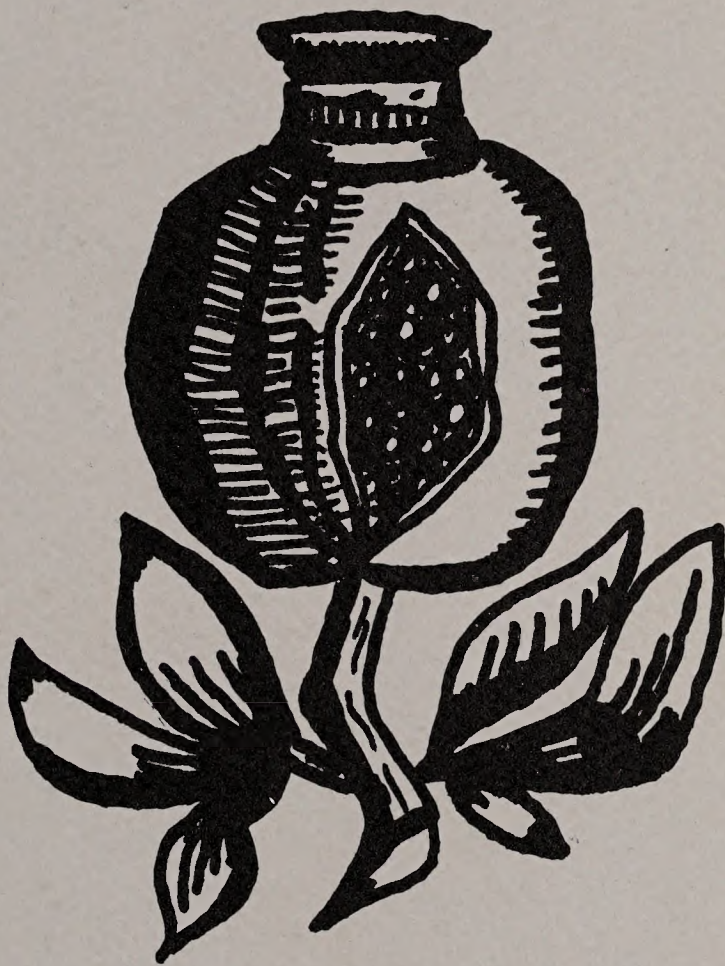


This image shows a blank, aged, cream-colored ledger page, likely from a historical record book. The page is tilted and exhibits signs of wear, including creases and discoloration. It features a grid of columns and rows, with some faint text and markings visible. At the top, there is a header section with the word "RECEIVED" and a date "JAN 10 1900". Below this, there are several columns labeled "NAME", "ADDRESS", "CITY", "STATE", and "COUNTY". The page is numbered "63-10" in the bottom right corner. The overall appearance is that of a well-preserved but aged document.



# NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL

North Carolina State Library  
Raleigh









# NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL

LEONIDAS BETTS, editor

Mrs. Deborah Merkel, editorial assistant

Mrs. Joan Sanchez, VariTypist

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY AT RALEIGH

Telephone (919) 737-3336

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A Sampling of Eastern Oral Folk Humor, <i>F. Roy Johnson</i> . .	3
Passing Through: A Folk Remedy, <i>Joseph D. Clark</i> . . . . .	11
Some Scottish Variants of a Burnsville Folk Song Fragment, <i>Douglas D. Short</i> . . . . .	16
Citations . . . . .	21
The Four-Mile Desert: A Horror Story, <i>Douglas Fisher</i> . . .	23
Pre-Blues Black Music in Piedmont North Carolina <i>Christopher Lornell</i> . . . . .	26

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# From the Editor's Desk

**ANNUAL MEETING.** The North Carolina Folklore Society held its sixty-third annual session in the Virginia Dare Ballroom, Sir Walter Hotel, Raleigh, on November 15, 1974. Charles Joyner presided. Following Amos Abrams' prelude on the Harmonette and the Concordette, Byron Schulken of Whiteville presented a slide-show lecture entitled "Dug-Out Canoe Making at Crusoe Island." The NCSU International Folk Dance Club, under the direction of Mrs. Robert Ward, demonstrated dances from around-the-world. Marshall Ward of Boone delighted the audience with his Jack tales. During a short business session, the officers of the Society were reelected. Brown-Hudson Awards were presented (see citations in this issue).

**FOXFIRE VISIT.** Eliot Wigginton and two of his students from the *Foxfire* project in Rabun Gap, Georgia, visited the NCSU campus on October 24 under the sponsorship of the School of Education. A capacity audience heard their program, "*Foxfire: A Way of Learning.*"

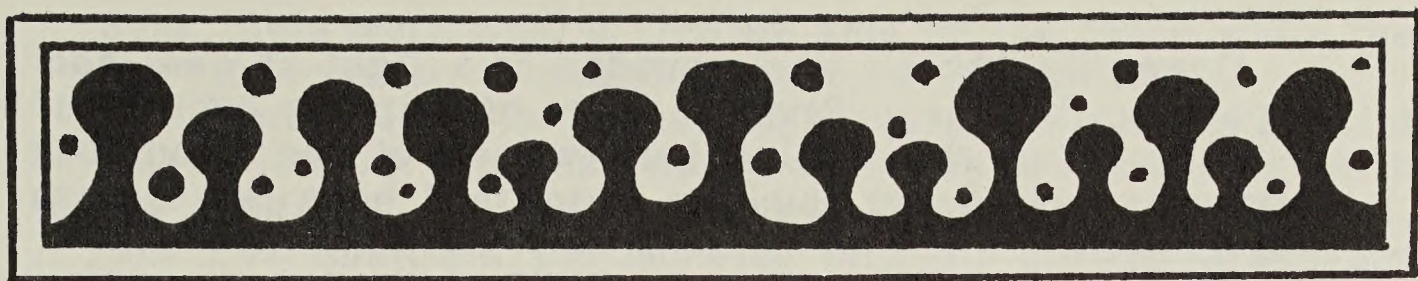
**PROMOTIONAL ISSUE.** The August NCFJ was sent to all public junior and senior high schools in North Carolina as a promotional issue. The results have been truly gratifying. We now have subscriptions in every public school system in the state.

**EDITORIAL ASSISTANT.** Mrs. Debbie Merkel has become the new editorial assistant for the *Journal*. Mrs. Merkel has quickly become adept at the intricacies of record-keeping, VariTyping, and layout. We are delighted to have her on the staff. In addition, Mrs. Joan Sanchez is working at the VariTyper on a temporary basis.

**EDITORIAL POLICY.** NCFJ welcomes collecting and research articles on North Carolina subjects and occasionally short articles of a general nature. Creative contributions cannot be used in future. Although there is no student contest this year, student work is constantly being printed, as evinced by two articles in this issue.

*Lionidan Betts*





## A SAMPLING OF EASTERN ORAL FOLK HUMOR

by F. Roy Johnson

Briefly we'll present some bits of folk humor collected from several counties of the North Carolina coastal plains. The stories, arranged in more or less chronological order, were chosen to illustrate the transition in styles and tastes of the people.

The Colonial period offers small helpings of oral matter, but two published books give some insight into what the people enjoyed. As the eighteenth century opens we find John Lawson both marveling and laughing at himself for mistaking a bellowing alligator nesting beneath his house for one of the powaws. A few years later William Byrd, a Virginia commissioner for the dividing line survey, laughs heartily at the innocent antics of simple North Carolinians. For example, one landlady beset by drunken suitors "fortify'd her Bed chamber & defended it with a Chamber-Pot charg'd to the Brim with Female Ammunition."

### A PIRATE LOSES HIS WIFE AND HIS GOLD.

*Production of naval stores from the great pine forests brought a wave of settlers to present Beaufort County during Blackbeard's time. One of these was a foreparent of Mrs. Minnie Hollowell Allen who came from Nansemond County, Virginia, to the Woodstock area in 1707. Mrs. Allen says that local people enjoyed telling how the notorious pirate was tricked by their foreparents, and she cites the following story.*

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*The author (Box 217, Murfreesboro 27855), a regular contributor to the Journal, is an avid collector of folk yarns.*



Once Blackbeard was wounded in a fight at sea, and he put into the Pungo River in quest of help. No doctor was to be had, but the skilled herb women of the Woodstock community restored a shoulder which had been run through with a sword.

The pirate hid his identity and claimed he was one Captain John Drinkwater, a man who lived at Bath.

While recovering, Blackbeard paid court to the pretty sixteen-year-old daughter of his host. When the wound had healed, the girl eloped with him.

Six months later the pirate brought the girl back home and with her a large amount of gold. He left the gold and the girl with her father for sake-keeping. But before he sailed away, the father and a son went down to his ship and found it to be heavily gunned and trimmed for speed.

Several months later Blackbeard returned, this time drunk with rum. He asked for his wife and his money. Neither were to be had.

"What happened to my wife?

She was dead, he was told; and the grave of a recently buried neighbor woman was shown him.

"Where is my money?"

The father said he had carried the gold to Bath and given it to Captain Drinkwater, as it belonged to him.

Blackbeard was not completely satisfied. He wanted to dig up the grave. But local people feigned horror: "It just won't be right to disturb the dead."

So he went away without his wife and without his gold.

### **SONGSTERS AT BRER BEAR'S WEDDING.**

*As agriculture and forest industries developed, bringing together white, red and black toilers, people began to laugh more. And there emerged a fresh new humor.*

*The numerous animal tales satirized, without causing offense. So Brer Rabbit went about kicking up his heels and bouncing his tail here and there as the preacher, the deacon, or the master. Rabbit tales possessed the longevity of the animal fable, and many are still being told in the eastern agricultural area.*

*These tales are too common to recite, so we'll pick a rarer one which was told in 1963 by Thomas Majette of Route 2, Ahoskie, Hertford County.*

The bear was getting married and he wanted to have music for his wedding. So he invited the famed songsters, the jay bird and the mocking bird. And he asked the fox to come along with his fiddle and also to render a song.

The wedding was held down beside an old rail fence not far from the bear's home in a nearby swamp. The two



song birds were seated side by side on the fence while the fox stood just over behind the fence with his fiddle.

There was to be a prize for the best singer. Old Jaybird was called up first, and everybody "wuz jes' charmed" with his song. But while everyone had his eyes on the jay bird, Old Fox snatched the mocking bird off the fence and ate him up.

Then the preacher turned to the fox and he say, "Brer Fox, hit's your go now."

At this, the fox got up with his fiddle, pulled the stick down, and apologized. "I can't sing as well as Brer Jaybird, but I sho' has got some good singing in me!"

### TOO FAR FOR A HALF-DAY'S WORK

*By the 1840s many North Carolina planters had moved to Mississippi for fresh and fertile cotton lands. Their labor force was comprised largely of surplus slaves exported by the older slave state. The sellers often kept their best and sold their less desirable ones. In 1969 J. M. Jenkins of Hertford County told of how one Mississippi planter sought to upgrade his labor force.*

William Barell Wise, a prominent plantation master of Murfreesboro, owned a large and strong slave man whom he used to service his black wenches.

When a Mississippi friend came to visit folks at his old home, he admired Wise's crop of strong and hardy young slaves. Wishing such a work force himself, he asked Wise to lend him his model of Apollo for awhile.

"If Sam wants to go, I can spare him for a few months," Wise said. "But it will be entirely up to him."

Shortly afterwards, Wise met up with Sam. "Sam, how would you like to go to Mississippi?"

Sam had not thought of the idea. So it took a long pause and some head-scratching. "Boss, I don't want to leave you."

"It'll be for only a little while. Cap'n Vaughan's got some nice black gals waiting there."

Sam thought some more. "How many is dere?"

"Oh, I suppose five or six, take or give one or two."

Quickly decided, Sam reached a hand toward his head and simulated, "Boss, if it jes' as well wid you, I druther not go. Too fur a piece fer jes' a half-day's work."

### THE DUMB SLAVE

*The Old Master tale seems to have been immensely popular among the antebellum whites, and today it is equally as well known among the blacks. Many such tales were based on the illiteracy of the common slaves. This one was told in 1968 by Obid Futrell, a native of Northampton County.*



This plantation master had a dumb slave man, so dumb that he was ashamed for anyone to know that he owned such a fellow. So the slave was made to stay at home.

But one day this master was carrying a bale of cotton to town to sell, and he needed his slave to unload it from his wagon.

Upon arriving in town, the master went to attend to some business. He left his slave with the wagon after telling him to say nothing to anyone. In that way no one would discover how dumb he was.

Soon here came two men. They looked at the bale of cotton and asked the slave whose it was. The slave said nothing.

"Can't you talk?" one asked.

To that the slave said nothing.

The men walked on, and as they were going away, the slave overheard one say, "That sure is a dumb nigger."

Shortly the master was back and asking his slave how he had made out.

"Boss," said the slave, "I doan open my mouth, but dem mens fin how dumb I is anyway."

## DISAPPOINTED YANKEE

*The Civil War brought sober faces and carpetbaggers. But some Southerners learned to laugh at the get-rich-quick Yankee. Shirley Baines of Gates County told one such story in 1964.*

A Yankee who had come south after the Civil War and purchased a large farm beside the Great Dismal Swamp near Corapeake couldn't understand why it wouldn't grow wheat and reap for him immense profits.

Surely it was not because he had bought the farm dirt cheap. While passing through as a Union officer a few years earlier, he had seen wheat growing shoulder high.

When he went to one of his neighbors to unload his complaint he was told, "Oh, that wasn't wheat you saw; that was only broom straw." Any Southerner knew that broom straw land was ready to return to the pine forests.

## TOO HOT FOR THE DEVIL

*Shortly afterwards some people started picking on the Devil, making him the brunt of folk tales. In 1960 S. L. Griffith of Hertford retold one from his grandfather:*

One time a man and the Devil made a bargain. They were to sit on a red hot stove. If the man sat longer, the Devil would make him rich; if he did not, the Devil would get his soul.

Soon the man began squirming around and the Devil asked him what was the matter. The man said he was looking



for a hot place. The Devil jumped up and cried, "I done burnt my tail."

So the man was rich the rest of his life.

## COUNT IT YOURSELF

*After famine brought a larger stream of Irish immigrants the dumb Irishman stories grew in popularity. This one was told by Edward Beverly of Hertford County in 1966.*

An Irishman was walking through the country counting his money. He called the amounts out loud. Each time, a bull frog in a nearby pool of water croaked, "Taint, taint, taint."

Shortly the Irishman became disgusted and threw his money over to where the frog was and said, "Test me, Jesus. Take it and count it yourself if you think it tain't right."

## THE BIG WASTE

*By the 1890s the ludicrous story became immensely popular with the country folk. John F. Johnson of Bladen County was telling this one as late as 1920:*

While making his rounds, a city milkman overturned his cart, and his milk gushed out onto the cobblestone street. A large number of people gathered to see the big milk spillage. There were so many that a late-coming man had to look over the necks of other people to see what was going on.

"Oh what a big waste!" he exclaimed as he saw the spilled milk.

He was looking over the shoulder of a large fat woman. She turned and slapped him in the face, then scowled, "That'll teach you not to laugh at my waist!"

## FRIGHTENED BY A BEAR

*By 1900 there was a growing disbelief in some of the old superstitions. This one, told by Louis Griffin of Hertford County in 1960, ridicules a very old one.*

There was a man who walked like a bear, and one day another man asked how he had gotten that way.

"You know," said the afflicted one, "when a pregnant woman is frightened by something, the unborn child may turn out to be like the thing which frightened her. Well, when my mother was carrying me, a bear got after her and scared her almost to death."

At this his companion looked at him hard and inquired, "Are you damn sure that bear didn't catch your ma?"



## RHYMES

*With arrival of better schools there came a rhyme for any occasion. Obid Futrell of Northampton County heard this one soon after 1900:*

Never slap the baby in the face  
When the Lord has provided a better place.

*Then World War I came and went, and as the cocky American doughboy returned home, Claude LaVerne of Northampton County heard "Ain't Going to Wear No Pants":*

My mama was born in Germany;  
My daddy was born in France;  
I was born in my BVD's,  
And I ain't going to wear no pants.

*War over, in the 1920s, William I. Marable, professor at Chowan College, Murfreesboro, heard "The Black Gal's Beaus":*

Old coons look alike to me,  
I get another beau, you see;  
He's just as good to me  
As any nigger ever dared be:  
And I don't like you nohow!

## IN THE DRIVER'S SEAT

*The boll weevil arrived in North Carolina in the 1920s and drove many cotton farmers out of business. Some accepted their misfortune in good humor. In 1968, R. F. Peterson of Bladen County recalled this widely current joke:*

This farmer bought himself a model-T Ford and was driving along the road when in hopped a boll weevil and seated himself in the seat beside the farmer.

Down the road a little piece the little passenger said, "Move over, Buddy, let me drive this thing."

"You are too little to drive a car," said the farmer.

"You are wrong there," replied the weevil. "I done driv 10,000 of these cars under the shelter already."

## CRANKING THE TRACTOR

*And about this time some farmers started buying tractors, opening the mechanized farming trend. J. C. Jackson, Chowan County veterinarian, tells of the experience of one farmer.*



This farmer bought a Fordson tractor. Like most of its kind, the tractor was hard to crank.

One day the farmer couldn't get it started, and he called on his neighbors to help with the cranking. By noon the thing still hadn't started, but they had cranked the tractor so much that the water was boiling in its radiator.

### THE OLD MAID AND THE OWL

*Old maid, gay widow, parrot and monkey stories together with the adventures of the traveling salesman were popular for a score or more years. William I. Marable heard "Praying for a Husband" in Lunenburg County, Virginia:*

This old maid wanted a husband very badly, so badly that one day she went into the forest to pray to the Lord to provide her with one.

Nearby an owl cried, "Who! who! who!"

Thinking the Lord had heard her, the old maid replied, "Any man will do! Any man will do!"

### FIVE CENTS WORTH

*The Great Depression brought hard luck stories, and J. M. Jenkins of Hertford County tells one he heard while teaching a few years later at Pantego in Beaufort County.*

Saturday movies were a dime in Belhaven during the depression. One Saturday a boy, an ardent cowboy-movie fan, found himself with only five cents. Nonetheless, he went to the movie house and pushed his nickel into the ticket window and asked, "Can I go in if I promise to keep one eye shut?"

### THE RABBIT AND THE TERRAPIN

*Then came the New Deal and economic pump priming; and Obid Futrell of Northampton County tells an animal fable from that time.*

One day a farmer and a WPA worker were criticizing each other.

The farmer said, "A WPA worker reminds me of the terrapin. He's so slow."

To this the WPA worker retorted, "And a farmer reminds me of a rabbit."

"How's that?" the farmer wanted to know.

"He goes with leaps and bounds after his soil conservation check."



## THE GLASS EYE

*J. M. Jenkins tells of an anecdote of a Beaufort County drunk in the 1940s:*

This Pantego character lost an eye in an accident; so he took a bus to Norfolk to get a glass one.

This fellow liked his whiskey, and he carried his flask along to shorten the long and dreary ride.

Back home in Pantego next morning and sober, he looked into the mirror and saw that his eyes didn't match. The glass was all bloodshot.

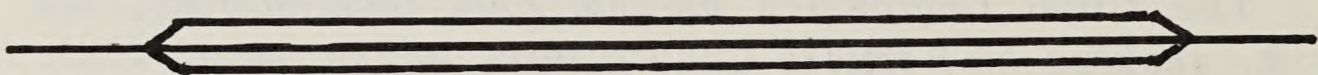
So he had to make another trip to the city, this time miserably sober. But that was no big waste. He kept his red eye so that he would have matching eyes when he was drunk or sober.

## THE POCKETBOOK

*By the 1960s the young people were getting really smart. This conversation was overheard on a street in Murfreesboro:*

"Honey, I don't have any money to buy candy. I didn't bring any with me," a woman told her six-year-old-size.

"Well, Mama, why did you bring your pocketbook?"



## TINTYPE

by Ruth Moose  
Albemarle

Copper and velvet, this browned Anne Clark.  
Leg-of-mutton sleeved, water silk rippled,  
lace crested.

Buttons a hundred tight her small boned waist.  
Cameo encameo.

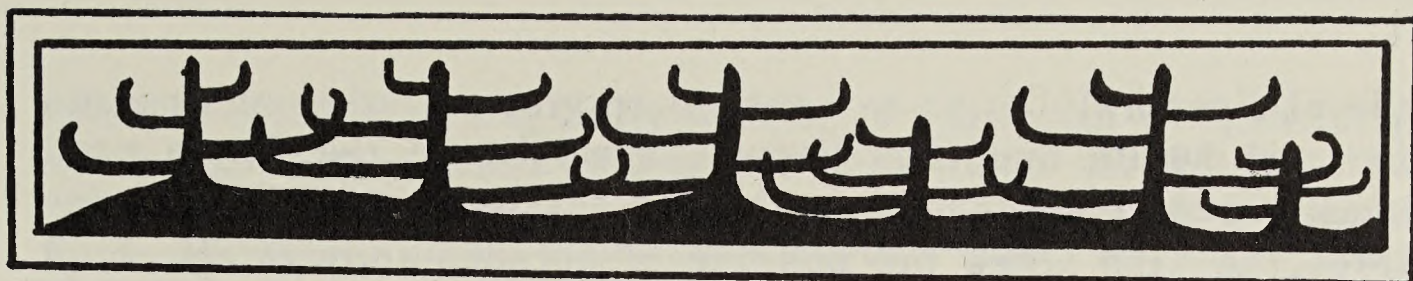
A beauty, folks said, but married too soon.  
Man twice her age, from well-to-do but hard working  
saving people. They pinches a penny twice  
before letting go.

No music save Sunday's dry organ and hymns, Anne  
held calloused harpsichord hands.

A thousand work days, nights of not sleeping,  
dead after a year.

They called it childbed fever.





## PASSING THROUGH: A FOLK REMEDY

by Joseph D. Clark

North Carolina, like most parts of the nation, has inherited much medical folklore from British, European, and other sources, as can be proved by glancing through Vol. VI of the *Frank C. Brown Collection of North Carolina Folklore*. In this volume, edited by Dr. Wayland D. Hand, are thousands of prescriptions for many ailments and, without surprise, the folk are still using a lot of them. Yet some folk hardly remember the use of specific remedies such as "passing through" to cure a rupture (hernia) or the whooping cough, or to exorcise the spells cast by witches and other evil spirits. (See *Brown* I, 667; VI, #311, 321, 421, 2721, and 2722.)

To amplify this procedure in curing ailments, Dr. Hand in his article "'Passing Through': Folk Medical Magic and Symbolism" (*Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society*, 112:379, December 1968) states: "Among the most tenacious early folk medical practices to have lived on into the twentieth century is the primitive custom of pulling patients through or passing them through holes in trees, stones, or in the earth, or moving them, or causing them to walk, crawl or creep through a variety of natural or man-made apertures for the curing of disease." He then cites numerous and varied instances of this medical process, along with some elaborate rituals and their symbolisms. Including the general backgrounds of the custom, he notes the frequency of splitting a sapling, preferably an oak or an ash or sometimes a willow, usually about the height of the head of a sick young person, then passing or pushing the person through the cleft, and finally binding

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‡ The author (15 Furches Street, Raleigh 27607), professor emeritus of English at N.C. State, is one of the Journal's most valued contributors.



the slit securely so as to cause it to grow together and mature in good health and thus become symbolic of the future good health of the person "passed through." Apart from awe-inspiring trees, he also notes the passing of persons through re-rooted bushes, over the backs and under the bellies of donkeys, through trouser legs, through horse collars, and so on, to cure ailments such as ruptures, rickets, rheumatism, consumption, whooping cough, boils, skin eruptions, measles, epilepsy, rabies, and other sicknesses.

The following three instances of "passing through" in North Carolina—the first about 1910, the second in 1916, and the third in 1937—are presented with excerpts from public and personal letters and by recent photographs of specific trees and persons.

### **RUPTURED BOY "PASSES THROUGH" A HOLLY**

Early in 1968 I had a long talk with one of my former students, Professor Walter M. Keller, head of the Forestry Extension Department at N.C. State in Raleigh, about the big trees of America. During the conversation he said: "I want to show you some pictures of the big holly tree in the Olympia community down in Pamlico County. In 1956 the American Forestry Association, based in Washington, declared this tree to be the biggest holly in the nation, but in 1964 it was supplanted by a bigger holly in Liberty County, Texas. To give you some idea of the great size of the holly in our state, I have here a letter written on October 17, 1949, by my immediate predecessor, Dr. John L. Gray, to A.G. Hall of the A.F.A. in Washington, in which Dr. Gray reported that he had found 'an American holly on the farm of W.J. Laughinghouse in the Olympia, Pamlico County, North Carolina, which exceeds in all dimensions the largest one reported in the November, 1946, *Report on American Big Trees*. This is the most recent list in our file. The dimensions of this tree are as follows: Circumference at breast height (4½ feet above the ground)—11'1"; Total height—72'; Average crown spread—45'. This tree appears to be in a healthy condition. It divides into two main forks about ten feet above the ground. The total height reading was taken on the taller fork. Mr. Laughinghouse told me that in past years there was a superstition in that section that if a ruptured person was passed through the trunk of a holly tree, he would be healed. He said that the





trunk of this particular holly was split open with wedges forty years ago and a ruptured boy passed through it. Whether the boy was healed or not, he did not say. The trunk of this holly does appear to have been split at one time, but it is completely healed over now."

When I read the final sentences of this interesting letter, I was amazed to note the legend about the unnamed ruptured boy's being passed through the cleft of this holly about "forty years ago." The tree, opened by wedges about 1910, has healed entirely and plainly reveals a gnarled ring about its body.

In a recent interview, Professor Keller said, "Most of the people in the Olympia community know and repeat the legend about the ruptured youngster, and many of them believe that it happened."

### **DOUBLY RUPTURED BOY "PASSES THROUGH" WHITE OAK**

By way of introduction, a few months ago I sent a brief statement about the episode in Pamlico County, including an explanation of the process of "passing through," to Dr. Rogers Whitener of the English Department, Appalachian State University at Boone. I requested him to insert it in his widely circulated newspaper column, called "Folk-Ways and Folk-Speech." Not long thereafter Professor Whitener notified me that two persons had sent him a few details about such cures.

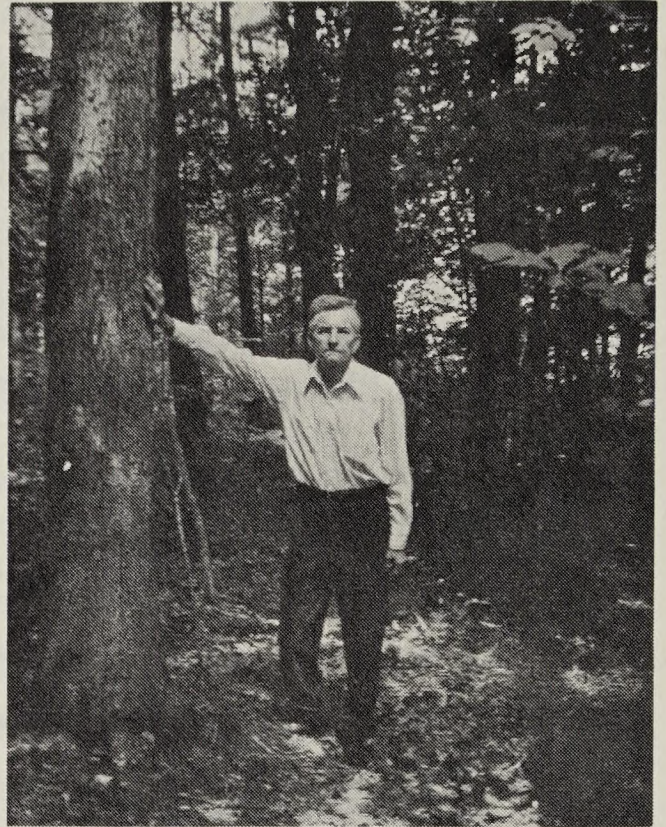
I wrote these informants for more information, and on July 23, 1974, Mrs. Novella Alonzo, of Purlear, Wilkes County, mailed me a letter. In her direct and exuberant manner, Mrs. Alonzo gave vital evidence about the passing of Garvie Huffman through a white oak tree deep in the forest of his twenty-six-acre farm near Purlear in 1916. She wrote: "My Daddy Thomas Nichols and a neighbor Harrison Nichols--went out in the woods and split a white oak tree--a young tree--I suppose the tree was five or six inches in diameter--I would say the split was four or five feet long--a wedge was forced into the cut to hold it open--Harrison Nichols's grandson Garvy Huffman who's parents was Bud and Bessie Huffman. They said Garvy was ruptured--and I remember that he was wrapped in a baby-blanket--Harrison pushed him through the tree and my Daddy took him out the other side--I was less than ten--...my parents and his parents and grandparents was there--...I have not been out in the woods where this happened lately--I know the last time I saw it--it was healed up a long scar but growing--...The place is not far from him. I know they gave him the land so no one could harm the tree--" In a later letter, Mrs. Alonzo described the careful and tender ritual of Garvie's being "passed through": "They stood in a circle--Garvie's mother stood to her Daddy's right--The Baby was then passed to Harrison--he passed him through the tree--to my Daddy--and then he returned him back to the mother--"

On August 29, 1974, Mrs. Clark and I, then on a pleasant journey to East Tennessee, stopped by previous arrangement at the home of Mrs. Alonzo and there chatted briefly with her and Garvie Huffman. Soon all four of us, after riding a short



distance in Mrs. Alonzo's car, took off on foot through brambles, briars, and a thick forest in quest of Garvie's beloved tree. Mrs. Alonzo gingerly led the pack and brought us all at last to the trunk of that important tree where, in spite of some cloudiness, I took a picture of Garvie beside the tree.

After another trek through the forest, where some deer browsed without fear, our party returned to Mrs. Alonzo's home and there delved further into Garvie's career. Garvie, now a widower, was born on April 19, 1916, and was the oldest child in the family. He now has two living brothers and six sisters; both parents are deceased. He is a veteran of World War II and, except for a small rash on his legs, he is in excellent health. About five feet six in height, he walks straight up and with vim. Though he had only five grades of formal education in the public schools of Wilkes County, he has a high degree of common sense and determination to think his own thoughts.



Mrs. Alonzo, a practical nurse, walks and talks with zest. She told us: "Folks were warned to be cautious about harming Garvie's tree." Garvie broke in somewhat hesitantly and said: "Before I was pushed through my tree, I was ruptured on both sides. The ruptures were cured at once—instantly and immediately. As the tree grewed up, I grewed up too." When pressed by questions about the genuineness of this sort of medical practice, Garvie retorted: "It takes a lot of faith—a lot of faith!"

### **A SMALL AND COLICKY GIRL HIGH IN THE MOUNTAINS**

Dr. Whitener also had a report from Baxter Presnell, whom he understood to say that he was cured of the colic when he was quite young. As soon as I received this report, I hurried off a request to Baxter for more information. After a while I had a response from Edd Presnell, Baxter's famous father. On August 17, he wrote: "Pro. Whitener misunderstood Baxter. It was Baxter's older Sister that we passed around the Dining Table Leg for colic. It was done by Mrs. Presnell and me, and she was passed around the table Leg from one to the other for nine times which was supposed to cure the colic. She was about 3 mos. old. She was cured of the colic but had a Headache from our Bumping Her Head on the table. She is now 37 yrs old married and has 5 children."

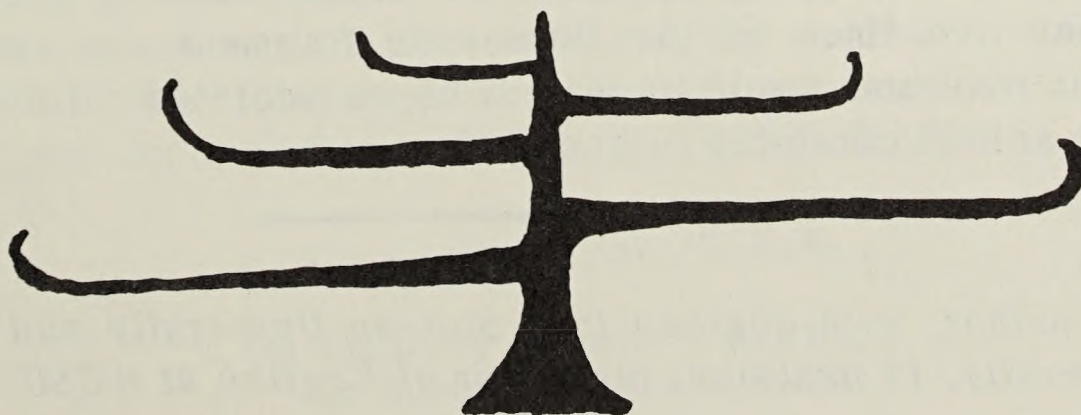


This personalized cure of the colicky daughter is within the tradition of "passing through," but it is only a small part in the good, busy, and refined lives of the Presnells.

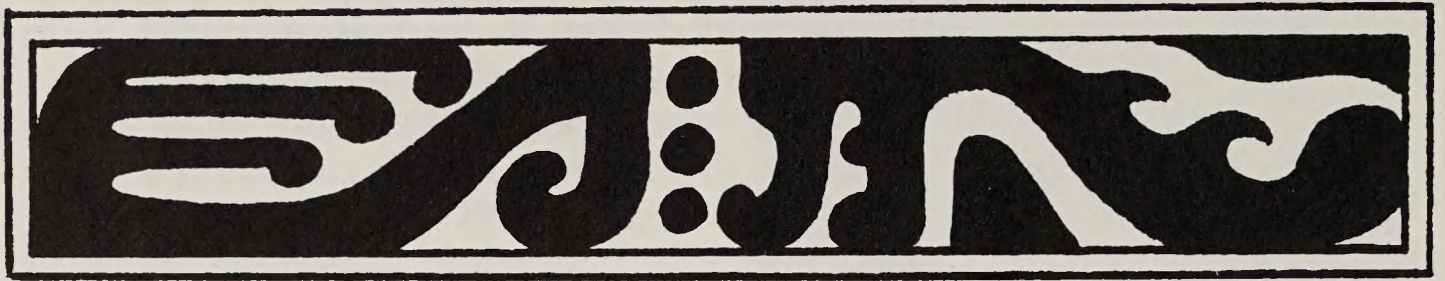
Edd and his wife Nettie, whom we visited on our return from Tennessee, dwell high in the Appalachians, several miles from Banner Elk. They have their being in an artistic atmosphere—he as a fine craftsman of dulcimers and numerous images in choice woods, and she apart from the duties of the home, as a master player of dulcimers inherited from her forebears or of those crafted by Edd. With gusto and noble feeling, Nettie, striking and fretting her cherished instruments, produced for us some of the best of the old folk melodies such as "Turkey in the Straw," "Sourwood Mountain," "Old Smoky," and "Ole Joe Clark." Their creative spirit, as shown in this photograph, is characterized by a love of beauty in a myriad of ways.

\* \* \*

When Professor Wayland D. Hand was sent an early report on the Wilkes County "passing through," he wrote from Los Angeles to Mrs. Alonzo that her "attestation" and the pictures which went with it had provided him with "the first instance, to my knowledge, where an actual occurrence could be authenticated."







## SOME SCOTTISH VARIANTS OF A BURNSVILLE FOLK SONG FRAGMENT

by Douglas D. Short

Near the end of their final sweep through the Southern Appalachians, Cecil Sharp and Maud Karpeles collected a scrap of a folksong from Mrs. Ellen Webb at Burnsville on October 6, 1918. The song was subsequently published in *English Folk Songs from the Southern Appalachians* as No. 202, "A Monday was my Courting Day." The lyrics are:

Last Saturday night my wife taken sick.  
A-Sunday she was buried,  
A-Monday was my courting day,  
A-Tuesday I got married.

So look a lookey there,  
So look a lookey there,  
So look all over yander.  
O don't you see the old grey goose  
A-smiling at the gander.

The song is clearly a fragmentary conflation of two distinct songs. The first four lines are part of a days-of-the-week folksong, that is, one that employs the days of the week as a structural or mnemonic device. Among the numerous folksongs and rhymes of this type are such popular items as the nursery rhyme "Solomon Grundy" and the proverbial "Monday's Child." The last five lines of the Burnsville fragment are set to a different tune and would appear to be an accreted refrain from a comic animal courtship folksong.

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‡ The author, with degrees from Stetson University and Duke University, is assistant professor of English at NCSU.



But the interested reader who seeks more information on this fragment finds no mention of it in the notes to the Sharp collection. Miss Karpeles wrote brief and very useful commentaries to virtually all the songs in the collection, but the Burnsville fragment is one of the very few for which nothing is provided. Furthermore, there are no variants of the song in the *Brown Collection*, nor have I yet located any variants in other major American collections. Recently, however, in researching a totally unrelated folksong, I came across the following lyrics in the Kinloch Manuscripts, a collection of seven volumes of Scottish folksongs dating from about 1826 (Harvard College Library, 25245.12; V, 80-81):

Merrily danc'd the quaker's wife  
 And merrily danc'd the Quaker  
 Merrily danc'd the quaker himself  
 And merrily danc'd his daughters.

The Quaker's wife sate down to bake  
 Wi' a' her bairns about her  
 To ilka ane she's gien a kake  
 and twa she gied the Quaker.      Merrily, etc.

On Saturday my wife did die  
 On Sunday she was buried  
 Monday was my ranting day  
 And Tuesday I was married;

Wednesday I did steal a horse  
 On Thursday apprehended  
 On Friday I was condemn'd to die,  
 On Saturday I was hanged.

And merrily danc'd the Quaker's wife, etc.

The Kinloch variant not only furnishes a complete version of the days-of-the-week part of the Burnsville fragment, but it also suggests a Scottish origin for that part. A few days after receiving photocopies of the Kinloch Manuscripts, I chanced upon a second variant that supports the notion of a Scottish origin for the folksong. The variant appeared in Robert Chambers' *Scottish Songs* (Edinburgh, 1829), II, 595:

Tune — *The Quaker's Wife*

On Saturday my wife she died;  
 On Sunday she was buried;



On Monoday [sic] I courted a wife,  
 On Tuesday I was married.  
 On Wednesday I stealt a horse,  
 On Thursday apprehended;  
 On Friday I was condemned to die,  
 On Saturday I was hanged.

Chambers pointed out in a note (p. 586) that this song and several others that he collected were taken from a manuscript compiled in Edinburgh during the decade 1770-80. Interestingly enough the Edinburgh variant is preceded in the manuscript by the lyrics to "The Quaker's Wife," the tune to which the Edinburgh days-of-the-week song was set. Those lyrics correspond to the first two stanzas of the Kinloch variant given above. Presumably the use of the same tune was a factor in the conflation of the two songs in the Kinloch variant. In contrast, the Burnsville fragment has attracted five lines of a song set to a different tune. Evidently the conflation here was to some extent the result of a thematic similarity. While I have yet to locate a complete variant of the folksong from which the last five lines were derived, these lines nevertheless appear to be compatible with the courtship and marriage theme of the days-of-the-week segment. They also appear to have the characteristics of a refrain, which incidentally is the function that "The Quaker's Wife" came to have in the Kinloch variant.

Thus when Mrs. Webb sang "A Monday was my Courting Day" for Cecil Sharp back in 1918, she demonstrated the survival in North Carolina of a little-known song of Scottish origin, one that dates at least from the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The history of the song in this country is uncertain, but it may well have been current in North Carolina since the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, when so many Scottish folk traditions were brought to the Appalachian frontier by the immigrant Ulster Scots.

As a final note, it is interesting to speculate that the ultimate inspiration for the song is a good bit older than the Scottish variants and may have been English rather than Scottish. The evidence for this view is to be found in a humorous print dating from around 1620 entitled "A New Yeares Guift for Shrews." The print, now located in the British Museum, illustrates the following caption:

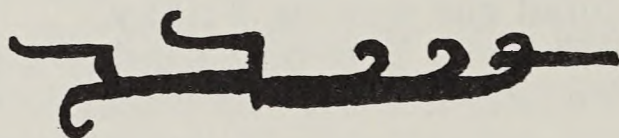
Who marieth a Wife vppon a Moneday.  
 If she will not be good vppon a Tewesday.  
 Lett him go to ye wood vppon a Wensday







Although there is insufficient evidence for any positive conclusions, it is possible that the Burnsville fragment is a distant cousin of the nursery rhyme via precursors such as the caption to the British Museum print or similar lines that have not been traced. Of course there are considerable differences between the nursery rhyme and the folksong; they are in fact the kinds of differences that are most often brought about by written recomposition rather than oral transmission. In any case, while the immediate antecedent for "A Monday was my Courting Day" appears to have been Scottish and to have predated Mrs. Webb's performance by perhaps 150 years, the germ for the performance may well predate the Burnsville fragment by over three centuries.



**OUTHOUSE BLUES** is the title of a full page of folklore in the *Sojourner* of East Burke High School in Icard. The teacher of the Folktales and Legends class compiling the material is Shirley White, who writes, "Folklore is definitely a part of our school curriculum, and I wanted you to know what we are doing in Burke County." Several local folklorists have been invited to talk to the students, who have been gathering data on superstitions, ghost stories, and good-luck charms.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR FOLK MUSIC BUFFS.** The Spring/Summer 1974 issue of *Southern Exposure* is a 116-page "Music Special" with handsome illustrations accompanying significant articles, among them several of particular interest to North Carolina folklorists: a survey of "Southern Rock 'N Roll"; a memoir of Bascom Lamar Lunsford; a feature on blues artists Gary Davis and Willie Trice of Durham; and an interview with Dink Roberts of Alamance County. Send \$2 to Institute for Southern Studies, Box 230, Chapel Hill, N.C. 27514.

**HIGHLY RECOMMENDED FOR THE FOLK SPEECH BUFFS.** *Bits of Mountain Speech* by Paul M. Fink has hundreds of folk expressions gathered between 1910 and 1965 along the state line between North Carolina and Tennessee. Each word or phrase is followed by its part of speech, a dictionary equivalent, and a sentence illustrating the locution. Here is an example: *fotch-on* (adj), imported; "I don't favor them fotch-on ideas." Anyone subject to fits or spells is said to be "fittified." And here is a good sentence: "They go to her church and his'n, time about." Send \$1 to Appalachian Consortium, Appalachian State University, Boone, N.C. 28607.



## Citations

*At the annual meeting of the North Carolina Folklore Society on November 15, 1974, three Brown-Hudson Folklore Awards were presented:*

W. AMOS ABRAMS, versatile gentleman. Since his college and university years at Duke and Cornell, Dr. W. Amos Abrams has distinguished himself as a high-school teacher, a professor of English and head of the Department of English at Appalachian State University, and the editor of the NCEA publications for the North Carolina Education Association (1946-70). Aside from these academic responsibilities, he has served greatly the common welfare through his being a club president and district governor of Lions International in North Carolina. In recognition of these and other contributions, Appalachian State University on August 10, 1974, conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Humane Letters. Dr. Abrams is a folklorist of the first order. For more than five decades he has collected ballads and songs, many of them with the late Frank C. Brown, and he has written numerous articles on balladry and other aspects of folklore. In the last several years he has assembled a large assortment of hand-cranked organs and has prepared about two hundred yards of music rolls for them. Throughout his faithful membership of almost forty years in the North Carolina Folklore Society, he has rendered yeoman service in many ways, particularly as chairman of the Brown-Hudson Award Committee for four years and as president of the Society for a like period. In view of these accomplishments, the Society now acknowledges that Dr. W. Amos Abrams is worthy of the Brown-Hudson Award. (Joseph D. Clark)

EDD and NETTIE PRESNELL. Few people in this age know who they are and what they want to do. Edd and Nettie Presnell have known since their marriage thirty-seven years ago. From that day they have been skilled and devoted mountain craftsmen, creators of graceful and often useful wood sculptures, ranging from tiny carved birds and animals to clear-toned mountain dulcimers. In a day of hasty and careless workmanship, their creations show a reverence for the medium and a sense of pride in the objects created. Through the years their reputation has grown. No southern crafts fair or exposition is considered a success without the Presnells, and the Edd Presnell autograph on a dulcimer guarantees its recognition and value throughout the folk and musical world. Collectors, writers, photographers, and TV cameramen have beaten a



path to the Presnell mountain abode and added to their fame through film and story. Despite all the fuss and attention, the Presnells have maintained their essential modesty and dignity, along with the creative pride that has distinguished their craft throughout their married life. Thus, the North Carolina Folklore Society honors itself as well as the Presnells in presenting them a 1974 Brown-Hudson Award. (Rogers Whitener)

BENJAMIN E. WASHBURN, distinguished physician, health officer, and author, was educated at the universities of North Carolina, Virginia, and London. He was born in Rutherford County in 1885, began the practice of medicine there in the South Mountains, and went on to establish not only the first County Health Office in North Carolina but also the County Health Agencies all over the state. For twenty years, as an officer of the Rockefeller Foundation, he supervised the establishment of Public Health Clinics in the West Indies, in Central America, and in South America. Upon his return to America he was for thirteen years the health editor of the *Progressive Farmer*. During these years he began to nourish a life-long interest in folklore, especially folktales and folk medicine. And he began to write histories of his experience in the hookworm campaign in tropical America the history of *Rutherford County and Its Hospital*, and the *History of the North Carolina Board of Health*. The fruit of his sympathetic understanding of the folk, for which he is chiefly honored today, is seen in his reminiscences: *A Country Doctor in the South Mountains* (1955), *Every Thing a Season* (1960), and *Rutherfordton Long, Long Ago*. As physician, historian, and folklorist, Dr. Washburn's humane good humor and genial temper make his works well worth reading. His interest in and his contributions to the preservation of North Carolina folklore are honored today by the presentation of the 1974 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award. (Harry C. West)

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**SUPERnaturalists among Carolina Folk and Their Neighbors** (Johnson Publishing Company, Murfreesboro 27855, 256 pp., \$8.50) is F. Roy Johnson's latest book of folklore. Devils and ghosts stalk most of the pages, and their stories are narrated by numerous informants. Can anyone doubt that F. Roy Johnson is North Carolina's busiest collector? Images appear on tombstones, a child is born with horns three inches long, a black snake crawls down a baby's throat for the milk the child has drunk, a banshee dwells on the Tar River in Edgecombe County, the reader meets with a sow ghost and a dog ghost, and a werewolf is discovered in Pasquotank County. We liked this sentence: "Arrangements had been made for funeralizing a black brother." This book is heartily recommended to all our subscribers.





## THE FOUR-MILE DESERT : A HORROR STORY

by Douglas Fisher

The four-mile desert is located off Highway 17 north about eight miles from Elizabeth City, going from Raleigh. According to Gordon H. Cameron, a native of Elizabeth City, the spot got its name from the fact that after turning off Highway 17 and driving for a short distance on an old dirt road, one comes upon a stretch of terrain about four miles long where hardly anything grows except scrub brush. The actual part of the four-mile desert which pertains to the narrative which follows is a bridge toward the end of the unusual terrain. According to a somewhat popular belief among some Elizabeth City residents, a young decapitated woman was discovered beside the bridge some years back, with rather unusual claw-marks covering her body. As one would suspect, a belief cropped up that the area of the bridge was haunted by a hideous creature (Thompson Motif G475.2, "Ogres"), some people saying that the creature was a monster, others holding the belief that the creature was some sort of wild-man (cf. *Brown Collection*, I, 683).

At any rate, here is a first-hand account of one man's personal experience with the four-mile desert, the bridge, and its attendant creature. Gordon sat back a while, to organize his thoughts I suppose, and began by saying:

You know, Kenny and myself were spending quite a bit of time together back in those days ('66, '67, and '68). We had heard a lot of stories about the four-mile desert for years, and had even been by there several times during the daytime. Anyway, we had been seeing these two girls from the high school,

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‡ The author, a student at NCSU, lives at 1012-A Village Green Way, Cary, N.C., 27511.



and one night, having nothing else to do, we all decided to grab a couple of bottles of wine and make a run out to the four-mile desert.

Kenny didn't have any wheels at the time, and neither did I, so we had to take his mother's car, a new Ford station wagon. We were a little worried about that at first, since the road was kind of rough, and it had just rained a couple of days before to boot. But after we got the girls sort of scared telling them all the stories we had heard about the place, we were even more determined to go, so we soon quit worrying about the car.

After we got the wine, we rode on out, me and Kenny feeling fine, and getting those chicks more scared all the time telling them the stories we had heard about the place. Now you've got to understand that that place is really eerie, no matter how many times you've seen it before. As we got close to the bridge, even Kenny and me were beginning to feel a little nervous, even though we had never taken those stories very seriously. Anyway, we pulled over to the side about twenty or twenty-five feet this side of the bridge and rolled down the windows just a little bit. The girls were really uptight by that point, because the bridge over that little creek was a freaky-looking thing, and the creek itself was real weedy and swampy, and combined with the noises from the frogs and crickets and things, it was enough to make almost anybody a little bit ill at ease.

So...after awhile me and Kenny had about finished the wine and had gotten all our courage back, and had decided there wasn't anything to worry about at all. We thought we'd get out of the car for awhile just to show off a little bit more than we had already. You should have seen them the minute we got out of the car. They rolled up every one of the windows and locked all the doors. Me and Kenny sat on the hood of the car for awhile and finished our wine, and the whole time we could hear the girls yelling that the place was really bothering them and that they were ready to go back to Elizabeth City.

Me and Ken had just been laughing at the girls, and I had started to ask him if he thought we really ought to take them back soon, when we heard something that shut us both up. We heard water splash right beside the bridge and the sound of something climbing the bank. From the sound of it, whatever it was sounded about twenty feet away and to our right a little. Kenny yelled for the girls to open the doors, and we came off the hood like a rocket out of a bottle.

We had just scrambled into the car when we saw a dark shape coming toward the car from our right. Kenny ground the starter, and for a few seconds the car wouldn't start. That really freaked us out, because one of the things we had heard about before was that various people had disappeared at the bridge because, once they turned their car off, it wouldn't start again. The damn car finally started, and Kenny threw it in drive and put it to the floor.



We just missed whatever had come up from the creek, and all of a sudden we felt the rear of the car weigh down. The girls started screaming and buried their heads. Kenny started swerving from side to side and, as soon as the road was wide enough, he slowed down, skidded the car around, and headed back for Elizabeth City. No matter how he drove or how fast, the rear end of the car was still weighed down.

At this point I asked Gordon why one of them didn't turn around to see what was weighing the car down, but he told me to go to hell; nobody would have had the guts to turn around and look. I agreed for the sake of the story and asked him to finish.

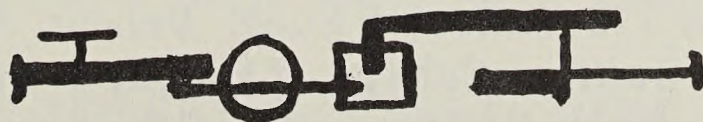
Anyway, no matter what Ken did, we couldn't shake the thing until we were almost back to Highway 17. Finally, about a couple of hundred yards from the stop sign, we felt the rear end of the car lighten up. I did muster up the guts to look back then, but I couldn't see anything at all. Kenny was sweating and the girls were almost hysterical. I was too freaked out to do anything except keep yelling, "What the hell was that?"

By the time we got back to Elizabeth City, we were calmed down pretty much compared to what we were before. Kenny wanted to put some gas in his old lady's car before he took it home, so we stopped over at the Spur Station on Main Street. We were all sort of caught up in a nervous giggle, and I was even saying that it might be possible that we had imagined the whole thing.

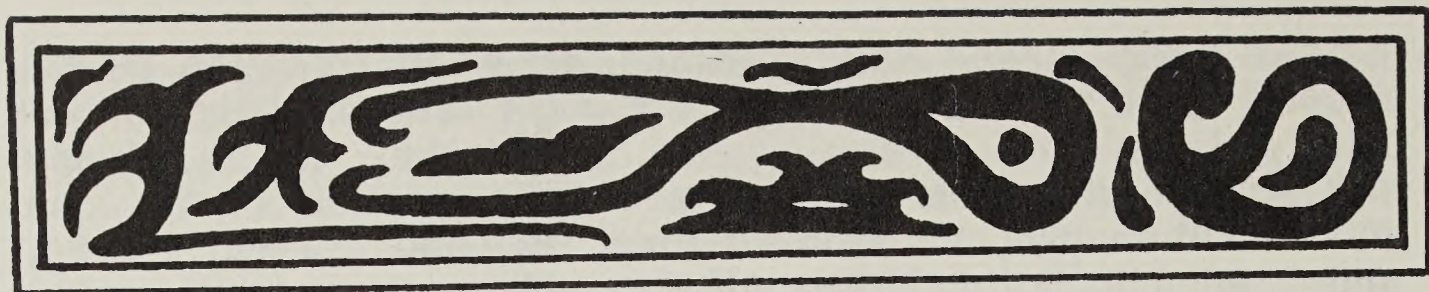
Then the guy that was pumping the gas yelled from the back of the car and said, "Hey, fella, what happened to the roof of your car?" Me and Kenny got out and went back and looked and this is the part you probably aren't going to believe. On top of the car there were two sets of deep scratches, about two or three feet apart. There were five scratches on each side, and they were a couple of feet long. When we saw those scratches, we really got so shook that Ken took us all back to his house.

Ken's mother didn't believe a word we told her. I guess you already saw that coming. Anyway, he had to pay to get the top of the car fixed. We talked about what happened that night for a pretty long time, but after awhile we just sort of lost interest. Anything gets old after a while.

The above narration was given to me as the truth by Mr. Cameron. Since stories of this sort are awfully difficult to decide as to their truth or falsity, I have left that up to the reader. I have tried only to present the narrative as exactly as possible as it was told to me.







## PRE-BLUES BLACK MUSIC IN PIEDMONT NORTH CAROLINA

by Christopher Lornell

Before the blues, what type of music was created among blacks? In spite of the resurgence of interest among white record collectors, scholars and enthusiasts in general, the pre-blues black music has been all but overlooked. Certainly little of it has been recorded or collected in any form. Blues in its rigid AAB, 12-bar-verse form has been around only since approximately 1900. A portion of that tradition, primarily the black banjo and fiddle music, exists in Piedmont North Carolina today.

Along with fiddles, the banjo was once an oft-used instrument among black musicians. The banjo once served the same function that the guitar has in more recent years, to accompany vocalists and provide, often in company with the fiddle, music for dancing. Although banjos are more commonly associated with white country music, they are basically an African instrument. According to Paul Oliver, in his book (*Savannah Syncopaters*, London, 1970, pp. 49-50) on the African retentions in the blues: "Among string instruments the most frequently employed and one of the most favored of all Wolof instruments is the five-string *halam*.... the *halam* may have been the 'grandfather' of the American banjo." Slaves, especially those from western Africa, brought the banjo to the United States, and soon the white population incorporated the instrument into its musical vocabulary.

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‡ The author (12 Paxwood Road, Delmar, NY 12054) is a student at Guilford College. This paper was sent to us at the suggestion of Professor Daniel W. Patterson, UNC-CH.



That blacks did, at one time, utilize the banjo in Piedmont North Carolina and other nearby areas has been sporadically documented over the past 150 years. An early citation appears in a survey by Dena Epstein (*Slave Music in the U.S.A. before 1860*, Music Library Association Notes, 2nd Series, Vol. 20, 1963, p. 380):

....James Kirke Paulding considers Negroes "by far the most musical of any portion of the United States....I have seen them reclining in their boats on the canal at Richmond, playing on the banjo and singing...." (Letter from the South, Written During an Excursion in the Summer of 1816, New York, J. Eastburn & Co. 1817, 1:118).

From the same source, comes an account (p. 384) of some forty years later:

A nostalgic picture of an open air-dance for all the young people of the neighborhood—whites only, of course—in Orange County, North Carolina, in the fifties, specified a Negro band, including two fiddles, flute, banjo, triangle, and castanets (James Battle Avirett, *The Old Plantation: How We Lived in Great House and Cabin before the War*, New York, F.T. Neely Co. 1901, p. 99).

Just as a more general note, Harold Courlander in *Negro Folk Music U.S.A.* (New York, 1963, p. 117) makes the observation that "the banjo was widely known as an instrument for negro secular music."

Even more popular than the banjo, it would seem, were fiddles. There are many more references to fiddle-playing among blacks than to the use of the banjo, perhaps an indication that the use of fiddles was more prominent or, more likely, that they were more visible at important social functions such as dances. Once more, Courlander (p. 119) helps us establish a broad overview:

As stated by Cable and other early observers, the fiddle was once one of the most popular of all instruments in Negro Folk music. Large numbers of old tunes that survive today are called fiddle tunes, even though they are not played on a fiddle, and, in many rural regions, informants testify that the fiddle was once the essential requirement for a good-time dance.

For references specifically to fiddle-playing in the Piedmont, the Averitt book cited above mentions a group including



two fiddles which performed in Orange County over a hundred years ago. Two accounts of black fiddle-playing (Eileen Southern, ed., *Readings in Black American Music*, New York, 1971, p. 117) come from a small town near Columbia, South Carolina, and were collected from ex-slaves during the mid-1930s:

C.B. Burton (Newberry, South Carolina), We danced and had jigs. Some played de fiddle and some made whistles from canes, having different lengths for different notes, and blowed like mouth organs....Peggy Grigsby (Newberry, South Carolina), The old folk had corn-shucking, frolics, pender pulling, and quilting....When dey danced, dey always used fiddles to make music.

Recently, Flyright Records in England has issued "Orange County Special " (L.P. 506), which introduces British listeners to John Snipes, a very fine black banjoist who lives outside of Chapel Hill near the Chatham County line. Just as blues musicians are well known for performing for weekend parties, the same holds true for the musicians whom recently I've been lucky enough to meet. A great many of the older black residents in the rural sections of Orange County remember well the visits that Blind Boy Fuller (a Durham-based musician) paid the area to play for dances. In this same vicinity today are three musicians whom I've interviewed extensively: Jamie Alston (guitar and banjo), Wilbert Atwater (guitar and harmonica), and Snipes. All appear on the Flyright release.

Back in the 1930s, Jamie was in a string band which included two neighboring white men, Carey Lloyd and Tom Bradshaw, playing fiddle and banjo respectively. The trio traveled around the county entertaining at square dances, usually white functions. In his days as an active musician, Jamie picked up some banjo pieces which he plays in the same finger-picking style he uses on guitar. He calls this style "complimenting," as opposed to the clawhammer style employed by John Snipes. Today Jamie can still pick four or five of these pieces.

Of the three, Jamie has had the most contact with whites and traditional white music found in the Piedmont. This is reflected in his repertoire. His tunes include commercially recorded songs which were popular in the 1920s. This is not very surprising because these are the kind of songs which square-dance participants would clamor for. Two are "Can I Sleep In Your Barn Tonight Mister" and "The White House



Blues," both recorded by Charlie Poole and his North Carolina Ramblers, an influential group who recorded in the mid through late 1920s. Jamie is most adept on banjo with "Ain't Gonna Rain No More," a song popular at the turn of the century. Another point concerning Jamie's banjo work is that although his grandfather and father both played, the pieces that he knows were learned from musicians whom he worked with after growing up. Jamie was quite simply more interested in guitar and did not bother with banjo playing until later in life. Quite unlike these older numbers are some lovely blues pieces. The best of them is "Six White Horses," which he picked up from Jim Hill in Burlington many years ago. The interesting point is that, besides the obvious eclecticism, Jamie makes little distinction between varying styles. In his view, they are all just music. Their origin is of no concern to him.

There is a close musical connection between Wilbert Atwater and John Snipes. Will Baldwin, the man who taught John much of what he plays today, was Wilbert's uncle. By almost unanimous consent, Will was the finest banjo player in Orange County, black or white. John, who is now sixty-eight, is the owner of a marvelous fretless banjo, once the possession of his older brother Floyd. (Floyd, incidentally, is still living near John but is too crippled by arthritis to play any longer.) Although he is out of practice, John can still play very well. The fact that his banjo is fretless is of some interest. It allows him to finger in between the frets, as it were. This allows him a freedom not available on a fretted instrument and gives his playing a chromatic sort of sound, almost dissonant to the ear at times. His playing provides us with an idea of what earlier banjos sounded like, since most of the banjos were fretless until about fifty or sixty years ago. His playing has a somewhat similar flavor to that of some of the mountain musicians who utilize a similar instrument. Fred Cockerham and Kyle Creed come to mind. The numbers that he still commands are primarily dance pieces: "Soldier's Joy" (he titles it "Love Somebody"); "Old Molly Hare"; and the universal crowd-pleaser, a fox chase entitled "Old Rattler Run The Fox." He possesses a strong robust voice which is well suited to his instrument. His entire repertoire consists of these pre-blues tunes and is reminiscent of the time, forty years past, when John would entertain and perform at the local dances, providing the music while another person called the sets.

Wilbert Atwater lives down the road about three miles from



Jamie. His guitar work is strongly personal, less notably affected by commercial influences. Besides blues, most of which bear Wilbert's own unique stamp or are indigenous to the locale, he also does some songs which were, at some point, banjo tunes. Both he and John play "Long Tail Blue," a tune which is well remembered in Orange County, but most often heard on banjo. When Wilbert first played them, I was struck immediately by their similarity to banjo pieces. The tuning that he uses for them is called "K.C.," which Wilbert describes as "sort of a cross between the way you tune a guitar and banjo." He added that, when he was a boy, the majority of older guitarists used that tuning. The two songs in this tuning that he remembers so far are "Buffalo" and "Can't Get a Letter from Down the Road." The first is a locally well-known banjo piece, but the second was unknown to me.

In addition to Orange County, the area between Mebane and Greensboro has proved to be a valuable one in my research. A network of banjo- and fiddle-players is centered in the Haw River vicinity. The veteran of this group is Dink Roberts. Throughout his entire life, Dink has lived near Haw River. He looks to be a man of approximately seventy but his actual age is somewhere between eighty and ninety! He has been picking banjo since he was a teenager, placing his musical roots at the turn of the century and even before that, if one considers the age of the people he learned from. His recollections go back to the time when the guitar was an uncommon instrument, and most of the blacks were playing banjo and fiddle. This observation by Dink helps to support the theory that the guitar has become popular only in fairly recent times (within the last seventy years or so). In addition to banjo, Dink plays guitar and, many years ago, the fiddle was also an instrument that he could "go" with, but age and lack of practice have all but taken that gift.

Dink still plays his banjo. A major problem is that he has difficulty remembering more than eight or nine tunes. Certainly his repertoire was at one time more extensive. There are tunes which, after they are played or mentioned to him, he clearly remembers; yet he is not able to perform them any longer. Among the tunes that Dink regularly draws upon are "Molly Put the Kettle On," "Jesse James," "Roustabout," "Ida Red," "Little Brown Jug," and "Buffalo." Like Jamie, Dink often was in demand at white dances. "I used to play three nights for the colored and three nights for the whites," he said. This testimony helps to substantiate my contention that,



years ago, much of the rural music played by blacks and whites was virtually identical. Dink could easily perform at black and white square dances, using a common repertoire.

While trying to track down two contemporaries of Dink's, John Arch Thompson and George White (both, it turned out, had died within the last six years), I was fortunate to locate Joe and Odell Thompson, the son and nephew respectively of John Arch. Odell is the son of Walter Thompson, John Arch's brother, who also enjoyed a fine local reputation as a banjo and fiddle performer. The entire clan is located near Mebane, only seven miles from where Dink lives.

Both Joe and Odell are in their early sixties and became interested in music after listening to their fathers. Odell is the more versatile, playing blues guitar, in addition to fiddle and banjo. Joe's talent lies in his fiddle work. Both were heavily influenced by their fathers and learned most of their tunes from them. Their repertoire features selections that have often been recorded by whites: "Georgia Buck is Dead," "Mississippi Sawyers," and "Ain't Gonna Rain No More."

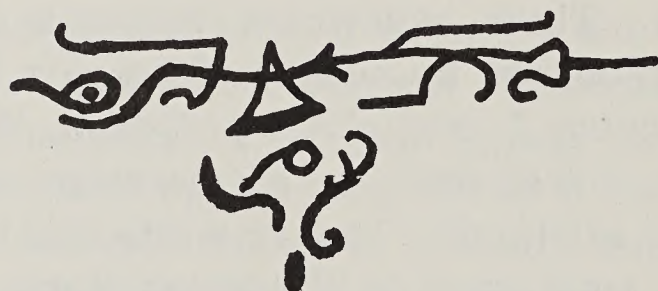
In retrospect, I feel that one of the main reasons that this style of music, so intricately tied to white music, has remained a staple of black musicians in Piedmont North Carolina is the fact that the white and black community has never been so stratified as in other parts of the South. The blacks did not seem to be so alienated from the white community as elsewhere; hence their musical style have remained closer over the years. Respect for the old-time tunes played on fiddle and banjo served as a common meeting ground for both races. The black musicians played for both white and black square dances, and drew from a similar repertoire for both groups. According to the musicians, the dances done by both groups were quite close, if not identical.

There was never so much a "need" for the blues, as for a voice which helped to separate the closely tied musical forms. The blues certainly became an important tool for the black musician but did not predominate as in other parts of the South. The atmosphere was more relaxed, allowing the blacks to relate to the older musical forms. Even the indigenous blues styles reflect this outlook. There is not the tautness nor the overt emotionalism found in the blues of the Delta or Texas. Instead, the Piedmont style is much more gentle and melodic in nature.

The obvious question remains. Did blacks, or whites, originate this musical style? It is, of course, impossible to



say but safe, and I think correct, to suggest that contributions were made by both. The fiddle is a European instrument, while the banjo is basically African in origin. With the exception of "Soldier's Joy," none of the tunes I have recorded employ melodies which can be traced directly back to Europe, although I would venture that their melodies would tend to be closer to European ideas. Because much of African music is dependent on rhythm, some of the syncopated picking styles are doubtless a black contribution. The words tell us little or nothing. The tunes are mainly for use at a dance and the lyrics, when used, do not help in pinning down the race from which they came. In addition, the oral transmission of words helps to dilute origins even more as musicians add or change words at will. The fact remains that there is a good deal of pre-blues black music still being played in Piedmont North Carolina, a music nearly identical to the native white music.



## THE PATRIOTS

by John Foster West  
Boone

Great-grandpa Sam Foster didn't give a damn  
about the war proclaimed to be for Southern independence.  
Said they were messing up a country readymade  
to pacify the slavers and their Ivanhoes.  
At last the Home Guard went a-hunting  
Sam Foster where he hid out in his woods.  
They shot him like a maddog and drug his carcass  
by his feet, dropping him on his porch,  
where great-Grandma Sarah wept inside,  
her belly big with Grandpa Hank.  
The brave Home Guard marched home, happy  
and patriotic; having hired alternates  
to fight for them, their duty was clear—  
to keep the home front free of deserters  
(and folks too poor to pay for alternates)  
and pure till peace robbed them one day  
of their sacred task.







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# **NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL**









# NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL

LEONIDAS BETTS, editor

Mrs. Deborah Merkel, editorial assistant

Mrs. Joan Sanchez, VariTypist

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

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Telephone (919) 737-3336

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Root Stories, <i>Gilbert Cooley</i> . . . . .	35
The Ghost That Rides, <i>Elizabeth Simpson Smith</i> . . . . .	44
Demonic Visits of the Bell Witch, <i>Harry A. Hargrave</i> . . . . .	47
A Morning With Harvey J. Miller, <i>G. Forrest Grindstaff</i> . . . . .	56

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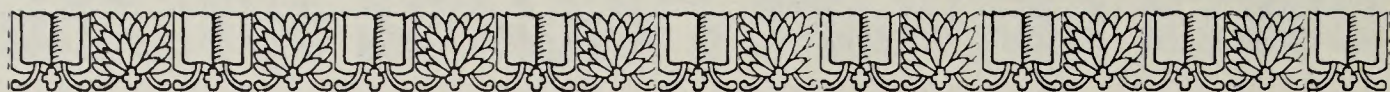
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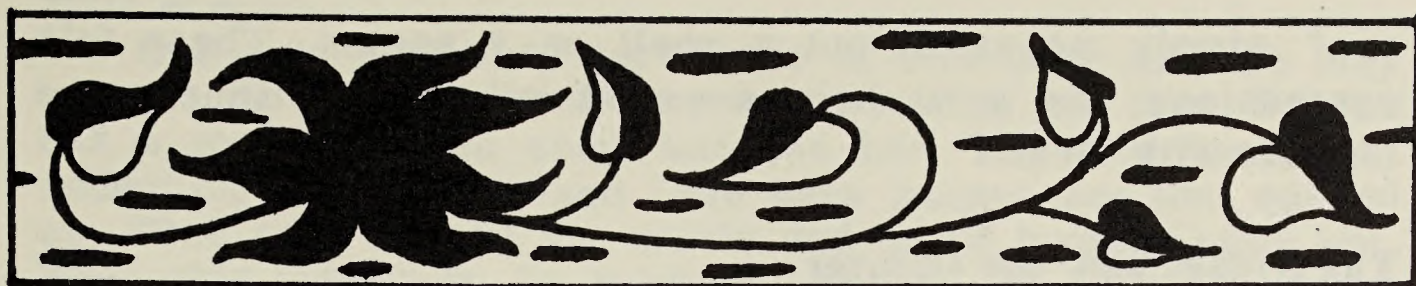


**THE BALLAD OF THE FLIM FLAM MAN**, a musical comedy by Herb Martin and Sheila Davis (Dramatic Pub. Co., Chicago, 115 pages), is of course based on the Guy Owen novel. Here it is called "A Country-Western Musical for Twelve Men, Six Women, Many Small Parts," suitable for high school and amateur production. There's a lot of folk singing and dancing, and it's great to hear Curley Treadaway plucking his guitar and singing a folk ballad. Mordecai Jones, the flim flam man himself, and Curley's girl Bonnie Lee, and Sheriff Slade, and Doodle Powell are all here, cutting up and enjoying themselves. Scenery is minimal, and only a piano is needed for accompaniment. Really, it's almost as joyous as the novel itself, nearly as hilarious as the movie starring George C. Scott—all that carrying-on in the Cape Fear country of southeastern North Carolina.

**UWHARRIE MAGIC** (Moore Pub. Co., Box 3143, West Durham Sta., Durham 27705, 215 pages, \$5.95) is a new book of folklore and Stanly County yarns by Fred T. Morgan, whose *Ghost Tales of the Uwharries* delighted readers several years ago. Among the 33 selections, there's good humor in "The Three Plucked Turkeys" and hair-raising horror in "The Black Beast." A variation on the Vanishing Hitchhiker turns up in "The Ghost with the Dirty Clothes," and a touch of the Frankie Silver murder appears in "Old John's Magic Ball." A "Bluebeard of the Uwharries" kills off exactly as many wives as did Seigneur de Retz 'way long time ago in France. Though "The Fork in the Grave" is a story we've heard from all parts of North Carolina, "The Ghost on Top of the Grave" has a terrifying freshness to it. Oh, one may think it difficult to get ghosts and witches and goblins all into one story, but "The Ghost at the Squeaky Pines" does just that. So convincing is Fred T. Morgan in "Thrash Doctor of the Uwharries" that we now darn-well believe that a son who has never seen his father can cure mouth sores by blowing his breath upon the affected parts. Except for a long bazzoo using unreadable Negro dialect, we think you'll enjoy every page in this book.

**BLACKBEARD THE PIRATE: A REAPPRAISAL OF HIS LIFE AND TIMES** by Robert E. Lee, professor of law at Wake Forest University (John F. Blair, Publisher, 1406 Plaza Drive, Winston-Salem 27103, 264 pages, \$8.95) is a biography—the first full-scale one—of North Carolina's favorite freebooter and her most evil-doing folk hero. Though the author's primary purpose was to investigate the legal and historical documents and thus to place Blackbeard within the context of his time and place, the fascinating legends have been recounted too. Did Blackbeard have thirteen wives? How much treasure did he bury among the sand dunes on the North Carolina coast? Such old questions as these are answered with authority.





## ROOT STORIES

by Gilbert Cooley

Many blacks believe in "roots" and can give descriptive accounts of hoodooing from personal experience. Secondhand accounts can be heard from almost all blacks.

Usually a person who has a grudge against another person goes to see the "root doctor" or sorcerer and purchases a "root" or an evil potion for his enemy. He then places or buries the root near the house of his enemy, generally beneath the steps. This act brings immediate suffering and sometimes death for the hated enemy.

The victim now visits doctor after doctor trying to get relief from his sufferings. Finally, he becomes disgusted with medical doctors and decides to see a root doctor. There he discovers that someone has put a spell on him. He then pays the root doctor, who now takes the spell off of him and puts it on the person who had it placed on him.

Most root stories revolve around jealousy, love, anger, revenge, and desperation. In a love triangle, one lover generally puts a root on the rival party to destroy all competition. A caught criminal seeks the help of a root doctor to get himself "off the hook."

The following stories use the words "root doctor" and "root worker" for sorcerer or conjurer. "To put a root on a per-



‡ *This is a section of a thesis written for an M.S. in Education at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro. Born in Robeson County, the author (Box 586, Rowland 28383) has an A.B. in English from Winston-Salem State University. NCFJ will publish his "Ghost Stories," another section of the thesis, in an early issue.*



son" simply means to put a spell on a person. These folk expressions are used because most of my informants were familiar with them.

### **The Nickel and the Quarter**

*Sometimes a root doctor simply shows an individual his fate, without trying to help him. This story was given to me by a man from Chadbourn.*

One time my aunt, who was a bootlegger, got real sick and went to see several doctors. They all told her that nothing was wrong with her and therefore there was no need for her to come back to see them.

She finally decided to see a root doctor. The root doctor told her that someone had a root on her. He then got a jar that contained some water—or something that looked like water. The root doctor then put a nickel and a quarter into the jar.

The root doctor told my aunt that the nickel represented her and the quarter represented the person who put the root on her. The root doctor then said that the nickel and the quarter would fight and the one that came to the top would be the winner.

Well, the quarter came to the top, which meant that my aunt lost. In about two weeks, my aunt died.

### **The Snake Root**

*A young woman from Columbia, North Carolina, recounted the following story to me. The root doctor uses reptiles to obtain the wanted result.*

This lady from Hyde County put a spell on this young girl who was courting her son. She didn't want her son to marry the girl and so she put a snake "root" on her.

Well, what happened was that when the girl would go off somewhere, snakes would come out of her legs, but they wouldn't bite her.

Well, one day a snake came out of her and bit her, and she died.

### **A Root on the Baby**

*A girl from Beaufort, South Carolina, told of a time that an unborn baby had a root put on it.*

One time this woman got angry with another woman who was pregnant and decided to put a root on the pregnant lady.

When the woman had the baby, it had skin like a frog or a lizard.

### **Some Root Doctor Paralyzed Me**

*A student at Bennett College in Greensboro related this*



story to me.

One time somebody put a root on this lady, and the lady became ill and paralyzed from her waist to her feet. So she had a root doctor to come and see her. The root doctor put something on her feet—and Lord have mercy!—her feet opened up. When they opened up, snails and small insects came out. When this was over, he wrapped her feet up. In a few days, she was completely well and fully recovered.

### **I Will Not See a Root Doctor!**

*Many people believe that root-working is the work of the Devil, and will refuse treatment from a root doctor. According to this informant, the results are sometimes fatal.*

One time my grandfather got very ill. We took him to see several doctors, but they couldn't help him. Therefore, my uncle suggested to my grandfather that he let a root doctor come and see him. My grandfather said, "The day that the root doctor comes in, that's the day I'm going out!" Therefore, the root doctor was not called in. In a few days my grandfather died.

My uncle then decided to go and see a root doctor to find out why my grandfather died. The root doctor told him that someone had a root on him. The root doctor also told my uncle that the root caused some green stuff to form in my grandfather's blood. This in turn caused his death.

When my uncle came home, he finally persuaded the family to have an autopsy on him. After the doctors performed the autopsy, they said that the cause of death was some strange "green stuff" that was found in his veins. They didn't know exactly what it was.

### **The Infection**

*Root doctors often cause a person to become sick by creating a live thing in the body of the person.*

One time an old lady had a small infection on her that would not heal up. She went to several doctors but they couldn't do anything for her.

One day she decided to see a root doctor. The root doctor put something on it and a small worm came out of it. In a few days, the infection completely healed up. The root doctor told her that someone had a root on her.

### **Don't Ever Cross Me**

*According to this informant, church people, as well as non-church people, visit the root worker to seek revenge, etc. He related this story to me.*

One time one of the sisters in the church got real mad with a deacon and wanted to see him dead. Therefore, she went to



see a root doctor. The root doctor told her to get some dust from his shoes and throw it back into the church and everything would be all right.

She did this, and the deacon had a heart attack and died.

### **You'll Bark Like a Dog**

*The informant of this story told what happened to a man who angered a root doctor. The informant is from Burlington.*

This happened to me when I was about fourteen years old. One day my brother and I went to a lady's house to tell her that her phone was off the hook. You see, we were on a party line; you see, if somebody left their phone off the hook, you couldn't make a telephone call.

When we got to the house, the lady was in a heated argument with this man who lived down the road from us. So he was blessing her out and using profanity and like that. And it happened that she told him that if he didn't leave her alone and quit bothering her, she was going to have him barking like a dog. He just cursed her out and laughed. And so the man turned around to go out, and the woman grabbed at him and pulled a little bit of his hair out. So he turned around and cursed her again.

About three weeks later, my brother and I was walking by this man's house, and sure enough I heard this man. He was hollering just like a wolf, just like a dog!

### **The Root on Grandpa**

*A junior at Winston-Salem State University related the following story to me.*

One time my grandfather let some people who were known to practice root-working stay with us. From the time that they got there till the day they left, my grandfather acted very strangely.

For one thing, he would let them do things that were unheard of for us to do. For an example, he wouldn't never let us bring liquor in the house, but he would even take a drink with these people! When they finally left, he became his old self again.

### **I Want to Marry You**

*One of my informants told how a woman convinced a man to marry her by putting a root on him. As in the other stories, this is an exact and completely taped transcription.*

I remember one time when this man and woman were courting each other. The woman one day decided that she wanted to get married, but the man refused. The woman therefore went to South Carolina and had a root put on him. A few days later the man got very sick and had to be put in bed. Many of the people who came to see him declared that they saw the print of a snake or a lizard on his stomach.



The man finally decided to marry the woman. In a few days he was completely well.

### **He Is Too Young for Her**

*Many people get their social partners by putting a root on them. The following story was told by a female who was from the area around Beaufort, South Carolina.*

One time there was this seventeen-year-old guy in our community who started dating a lady about ten years older than he was. He fell out with his mother and father because they didn't approve of him talking to this lady. Then he left his parents and moved in with this lady.

Many people said that the lady had put a root on the boy by mixing some of her blood from her menstrual cycle into some food, and then getting him to eat the food.

The mother and the father of the boy finally decided to see a root doctor about this. He told them that it was true that the lady had a root on their son, but he couldn't help him unless they found out what day her menstrual cycle came on.

The mother and father never did find out what day her menstrual cycle came on, so the root doctor couldn't help their son. The boy is still staying with the lady.

### **Bootleg Whiskey and the Police**

*The informant that gave me this story explained how his aunt stopped the police from bothering her by consulting a root worker.*

One time my aunt got caught by the police for selling bootleg whiskey. After she got caught, it was not long before she started selling it again. Like before, she was caught again.

She then decided that she had better see a root worker because she didn't plan to stop selling her liquor. She, along with my other aunt, went to Bishopville, South Carolina, to see a root doctor. After she told the root doctor about her predicament, he gave her something to keep the law off of her back.

From this time on, she has never been bothered with the law anymore.

### **Manslaughter**

*Root doctors frequently get the guilty "off the hook," as told by a young male from Rowland.*

One evening two guys were riding along in a car on their way back to town. As they got almost home, a little child ran out in the street and was hit and killed by the car. The police came and took the driver to jail. The police held him for about ten hours and then released him on bail.

The driver went immediately to see a root doctor. He told the root doctor about his situation, and the doctor assured him that there was nothing to worry about.



Well, on the day of the trial, the driver's case was not called. He went back to court the following day but it still was not called. He then decided not to go back. He never heard anything else about the case.

### **The Operation**

*One university student from Rowland related this story to me as evidence of the superiority of root doctors as compared to medical doctors.*

I have an aunt who lives in New York. One time she got very ill and had to go to the hospital. The doctors there told her that she would have to have an operation. This she flatly refused. She said that the only thing that was wrong with her was that someone had a root on her and was trying to kill her.

She then decided to leave the hospital and make a trip to Clio, South Carolina, to see her root doctor. The root doctor gave her "something" and told her not to worry.

To this day she has not had the operation, and her health has greatly improved.

### **My Uncle and the Root Doctor**

*A college student at North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University related this story to me.*

Before I came to college, I often went with my uncle to a root doctor's house. During these visits I was always told to remain in the front room while my uncle and the root doctor went to the back room.

After a long period—about two or three hours—they would come out of the room. My uncle would now have enough "stuff" to combat the spell that someone had on him. Occasionally the root doctor would give him things like a cross, a bone, some salt, or a root to shield him from spells and evil spirits.

Once, following the root doctor's advice, my uncle went to the graveyard at night. While there, he buried several pennies at various graves. He was trying to make the evil spirits leave him alone.

### **Coughed Up a Snake**

*The informant who told me this story was from Chadbourn.*

One night my grandfather had an asthma attack. During this attack he coughed and coughed. After about an hour or so of coughing, he coughed up a live snake.

The snake got away by crawling through a crack in the wall. After the snake had gone, my grandfather became all right. He said that this happened to him because someone had a root on him.

### **Joe's Wife**

*A young man from Middlesex related this story to me. He*



*tells how a husband got his wife to come back to him.*

This was a man named Joe. His wife left him and went to New York. Well, the people in the community teased Joe for about a week, so Joe told the people, "Well, I'm not worried about it."

So Joe went to see a root doctor. The root doctor told Joe not to worry because he could make her come back to him either on her own will power—or "feet first," which meant that she would come in a casket. Joe told him that he wanted her to come back on her own will power.

The root doctor in turn wrote a letter to Joe's wife in New York. After she received the letter, she had severe headaches. They continued all through the night. The next morning, she caught a bus for home. So she came home on her own will power.

### **A Root on Grandma**

*A native of Greensboro recounted the following story that his father had told him.*

It happened way back when my father was a boy and he was living over in Danville, Virginia, in a little place called Ringo. And my Aunt Gustavia—or my grandmother Gustavia, my father's mother—used to work at a laundry. She was a nice looking lady and many people who came in the laundry wanted to court her.

The man who ran the laundry was a white man. Well, he also got eyes for grandma. When he asked her if she would go out with him and everything, she said "No!" So he got mad with her and put a root on her.

About two weeks later, after grandma had come home from work, her leg began to swell, and it grew about twice or three times its normal size. Nobody in the family knew what was wrong, and the swelling continued until grandma went into a state of semiconsciousness.

My father and his brothers were young boys at that time—around the age of thirteen—and they really didn't know how to handle the situation. And so they finally called in for medical help. The doctors came in and they looked at her, and they said that they couldn't do too much for her, but they did leave some medication for her.

She still didn't get any better. So an old doctor came in one day and he told my father's oldest brother Percy that they needed to go to someone that knew more than he did. Okay, and he got up and left. Now the boys interpreted this as meaning that they needed to go and see a root doctor.

One day while my father and Percy were out in the field, a stranger came over the hill wearing a black suit and a black hat. When they looked up, they were frightened and started to run, but he called out: "Wait! I'm here to help your mother!" And so my father and Percy looked at the man and didn't fear him anymore. He came over to them and told them to show him



where they lived. This they did.

Upon arriving at the back door of the house, he went up some wooden steps, planking-style, and entered the house. Coming through the kitchen and the living room, he walked on into the bedroom of my sick grandmother, who now was in a state of unconsciousness and was making sounds like a barking dog.

He looked at her for a few minutes and then he came back out of the room to talk to the boys. Percy, the oldest, assumed the authority. And the man sensed this and addressed him. He told him that he could save his mother if he would give him a certain amount of money. This Percy readily agreed to. He had been working for about two years and had saved a little money, and so he paid the man.

And so the man went out the back door again and knelt down at the foot of the wooden steps and began to pray. And he prayed long and he prayed hard. And my father said he had never seen a man pray that hard before. He must have been out there, my father estimated, for about three hours.

And then he stood up and walked around the steps and began digging underneath them. He dug up an object that was made of two bones, a small box, and a lock of my grandmother's hair. He put this into a paper bag and walked into the house and told Percy to take it down to Buffalo Creek. He told Percy that when he got to the creek to turn around to it, and then throw the bag across his left shoulder into the creek. He also told him not to look back under no circumstance.

The man, during this time interval, reached into his black pocket and pulled out a vial of oil and then entered into the sick room. He then rubbed the oil over his arms, his hands, and his elbows thickly. Next, he uncovered the swollen leg of my grandmother and then rubbed the oil over her leg slowly. After he rubbed the oil over her leg, he then turned his palms upward, and in them were a mass of small white worms. He shook his hands and you could see and hear the worms falling on the floor like sand. He repeated this several times. And each time he would turn his hands up, there would be worms in them. And he would shake them on the floor. After he finished, he gave the bottle to my father and told him to use this medication for a couple of days and his mother would be all right.

Now Percy arrived at Buffalo Creek, and he turned his back to the creek as he was instructed, and then threw the bag over his left shoulder. And when he did, he exclaimed that he heard a catlike and ferocious sound as though some animal was struggling for life. He said the sounds got louder and louder until he couldn't stand it any longer; therefore, he ran back home.

When he arrived home, the old man and my father were sitting in the living room. And the old man said to Percy, "Son, now I can put this root on the man that put it on your grandmother, or I can put it on his wife, or his children. I can put it



on his cattle, his dogs, or any of his livestock. What do you want me to do?"

Percy said, "If he was dirty enough to put it on my grandma, then you put it back on him!" The old man then said, "Now the man that did this to your grandmother is going to come and ask you for a dime. He is going to be here as sure as I am sitting here. When he comes, do not give him a dime whatever you do. If he doesn't get a dime, he will die, and *he must get that dime from you!*" The old man said his goodbyes and parted, and he was never seen again by my father or the other boys.

About a month later, my father, Percy, and another brother named Dominion, who was very fiery in temper, were sitting in the living room. My grandmother Gustavia was sitting up in the bed now. She was now taking soups and teas and her condition was improving. While the boys were sitting there, a knock came on the door. My father opened it. The white man from the laundry was there, and his head was down. He entered and didn't say any words of greetings or anything, and walked to the middle of the floor and faced Percy and said, with his head still down, "Could I please have a dime? I've done a lot of wrong things and I regret them, and I've made a lot of foolish decisions lately but I am very sorry for what I've done." And he reached his hands out and said, "May I please have a dime from you?"

Well, Dominion, the fiery one, jumped up and got the hatchet. He then ran toward the man, attempting to kill him. My father and Percy wrestled him down and told him not to kill him whatever he did. While holding Dominion, Percy told the white man to leave their house. The white man pleaded one more time for the dime. Dominion then said, "If you don't leave, I am going to kill you right now!" The white man turned around and he left.

Two weeks later after this incident, the white man's leg swole up and he went through the same agony and suffering that my grandmother had gone through, and he died within this time period. And it was noted that before he died, he, like my grandmother Gustavia, barked like a dog.

These stories reveal an unorthodox side of the black man. Instead of turning to the traditional God, he now turns to hoodooism. He simply refuses to wait on God who comes when "He feels like it." The black man who engages in hoodooism wants vengeance now. He also wants his other problems solved quickly. Therefore, he hires a "root doctor" or a sorcerer to take care of things. As we saw in "I Want to Marry You," the woman quickly solved her problem by putting a root on her lover. A similar incident happened in "Joe's Wife." After his wife left him, Joe decided to have a root put on her so that she would return. Root-working seemingly becomes the fast and easy way out.





## THE GHOST THAT RIDES

by Elizabeth Simpson Smith

You might say the ghost of Kings Mountain is lazy. At least it appears that way. For as long as anyone can remember he's been hanging around the Linwood Road area and hitching moonlight rides. First it was horses, but lately he's gone modern.

Back during the horse-and-buggy days he'd spot a lone rider, materialize from out of the woods, and leap on the horse behind the rider. He'd cling to his terrified benefactor so tightly the poor fellow couldn't jump or stop, only spur his steed ahead at its quickest pace. When his destination was reached, the ghost would alight and his shapeless form would be seen streaking off into the woods again.

But in 1950 he selected a more modern conveyance. A group of Kings Mountain hunters had been stalking rabbits on Milk Dairy Creek in the Linwood area all afternoon. No one seemed to notice when darkness settled in. Their dogs were still jumping and running rabbits and the hunters were as enthusiastic as when they started.

Suddenly "something" white dashed from the swamps and headed their way. The men took to their automobile (a 1939 model with running board) with lightning speed, leaving the whining, tail-dragging dogs to fend for themselves.

The driver jerked the car into gear and started down the old sawmill road. The ghost jumped on the right fender, pressing his weight forward till the vehicle took a decided list to starboard.

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‡ The author (Rt. 1, Box 486, Iron Station, N.C. 28080) now lives at "Vesuvius," a mansion built in 1792 for General Joseph Graham.



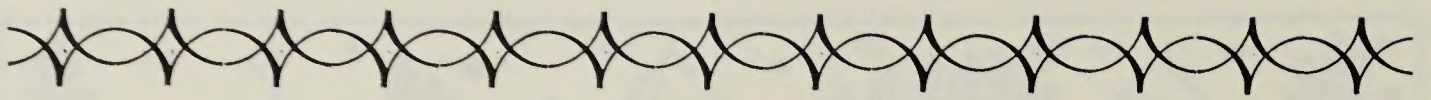


"Let your window down and I'll empty my shotgun into him," a backseat passenger shouted. But the rider up front was frozen with fear. He didn't move. Just before the careening car reached the highway the ghost jumped from the fender and headed for a plum thicket.

The driver kept his foot to the floorboard. Nobody looked back. The passengers just kept their eyes straight ahead. They weren't waiting for any thanks for the lift. They didn't even take time to figure why a ghost had to ride anyway. Why couldn't he walk—or float.

He must have been real lazy. Or maybe just restless.





## THE SUM OF THE PARTS

by Danyne Carol Romine, Charlotte

Waightstill Avery, County of Burke,  
being of sound mind did make  
his last will and testament in 1819.

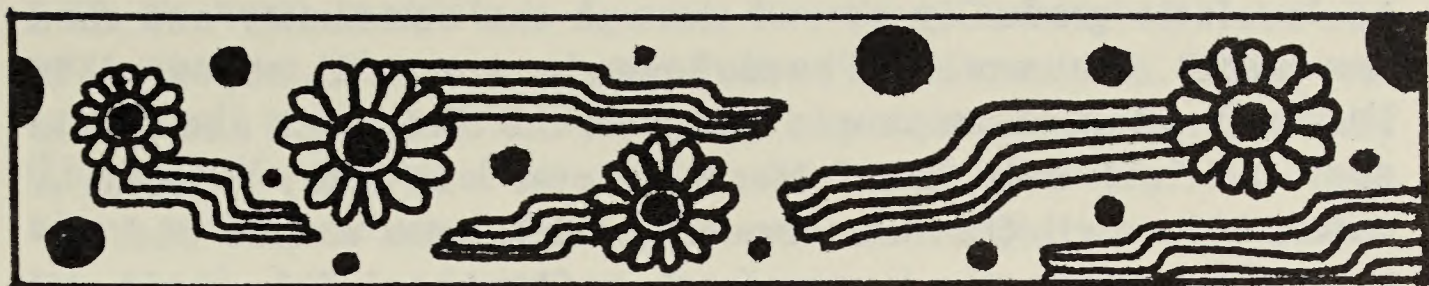
To his son Isaac Thomas  
he did give and devise  
all his slaves and his Negro wench  
and all his lands on both sides  
of the French Broad  
and on the East Fork of Pigeon River  
and all his tracts  
in Haywood County on Big Creek  
and other branches thereof.  
This much he did give and devise  
to Isaac Thomas  
his heirs and assigns forever.

To his daughters  
Betsy, Polly and Selina Louisa  
he did give and devise  
mourning rings of gold  
to be inscribed with such mottoes  
or legends as they may choose.  
This much he did give and devise  
to Betsy, Polly and Selina Louisa  
their heirs and assigns forever.

And to Leah  
beloved wife of his bosom  
he did give and devise  
his favorite reading chair  
and a likely horse of the value  
of one hundred dollars at least.  
This much he did give and devise  
to Leah, beloved wife of his bosom.

Last, he did entreat each one  
not to envy or covet  
the lot of another  
but each to receive the part here given  
as the bounty of heaven  
and to be assured  
that for the love he bore  
he would wish  
that the part allotted to each  
was more and better than the whole.





## DEMONIC VISITS OF THE BELL WITCH

by Harry A. Hargrave

In 1782, John Bell (b. 1750, Halifax County, N.C.) married Lucy Williams of Edgecombe County and received as dowry two slaves, a woman Lucy and her son Dean. After 22 years of married life—apparently happy, producing a family of six children—and successful farming in Edgecombe County, John Bell decided to follow other North Carolinians to a farming community in Middle Tennessee near the town of Adams in Robertson County. There he purchased a thousand-acre farm of rich land on the Red River. The new home was a story-and-a-half log building of six rooms and a large reception hall. It was among the finest homes in the county and Bell was in familiar company, for the leading families in the area had come from Edgecombe County.

For twelve years the Bell family continued to prosper and the six children grew into young adults. But in 1816 a calamity befell them that was to change the family's life and was to follow some of its members for the rest of their days. A spirit came for a four-year visit. When it departed early in 1821, John Bell was dead and Lucy was seriously ill. The younger daughter Betsy had broken her engagement to the handsomest young man in the community; and John, Jr., knew much of what was in store for the future.

Here a pause must be made and a few conclusions drawn about "spirits." The visitor to the Bell home was called a witch, and thousands of stories grew up about the Bell Witch



‡ *The author, a native Tennessean now Associate Professor of English at NCSU, specializes in such diverse areas as cinema history and Tennyson.*



as her fame gradually spread through the community and then throughout the world. These legends are still repeated in Middle Tennessee as people fish from the river bank and picnic near the "old Bell farm." Her character was many-faceted. A witch is an evil creature come from Hell with malice and torture. This spirit was certainly that. She hated John Bell and especially tormented him by such tricks as making his shoes fly off his feet on a November morning walk over the frosty ground to the hog barn. But she loved the mother Lucy and, during her bout with pleurisy, dropped wild grapes onto her bed when she could eat nothing else. And the spirit respected John, Jr., even when he confronted her, damned her, and ordered her from the premises. Thereafter she held long conversations with him. Most strangely, the spirit often joined the evening family prayer service, singing hymns in a beautiful voice and repeating verbatim the sermons of the previous Sunday. Yet she slapped daughter Betsy until her face was black and blue, and pulled her golden hair until the tangles could not be undone. Indeed, the visitor was a strange spirit.

In early times the appropriate word to describe a witch or warlock was demon, and in medieval times a distinction was made between the daemon (a good spirit doing the work of God) and demon (an evil spirit sent from Satan). Gradually the word was simplified to demon and the connotation was almost always that of evil. But as late as the Elizabethan era the idea persisted that the spirit came from Heaven and worked for good. When Hamlet first meets the Ghost of his father, he wonders whether it comes from Heaven or Hell.

*Enter Ghost.*

*Horatio.* Look, my lord, it comes.

*Hamlet.* Angels and ministers of grace defend us!  
Be thou a spirit of health or goblin damned,  
Bring with thee airs from heaven or blasts from hell,  
Be thy intents wicked or charitable,  
Thou com'st in such a questionable shape  
That I will speak to thee. (I,iv,38-44.)

With the revival of interest in the supernatural world in the nineteenth century—only shortly before the story of the Bell Witch was abroad—Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote of a similar spirit in "Christabel." The poem is fragmentary, a sort of vampire story. In it the innocent Christabel finds a strange lady in a forest at midnight under a full moon. Christabel offers Geraldine shelter for the night. Geraldine seems to be a vam-



pire, or more properly a Lamia; for when Christabel rises the next morning, she is weak and full of a sense of sin. The poem breaks off as Geraldine is turning her attention to Sir Leoline, Christabel's father. However on the night before, prior to her sleep with Christabel, Geraldine encounters Christabel's guardian angel, her dead mother. Inadvertently in a moment of pity she has called up the spirit. But she quickly orders her away:

Off, wandering mother! Peak and pine! (1.205.)

And she turns to Christabel with these comforting words:

All they who live in the upper sky,  
Do love you, holy Christabel!  
And you love them, and for their sake  
And for the good which me befell  
Even I in my degree will try,  
Fair maiden, to requite you well. (11.227-232.)

Most critics who find meaning in the fragment take these lines as revealing the purpose of the poem: evil is necessary to salvation. Thus Geraldine is a daemon who is doing evil which will ultimately work toward good. And thus *Christabel's* name has a richly symbolic meaning in the poem. Coleridge sought long for a source of publication. Wordsworth rejected it from *Lyrical Ballads*, and the poem did not appear in print until 1816: the year of the strange visit to John Bell's home.

While the coincidence is only interesting, Geraldine and the "Bell Witch" share similar characteristics. The Bell demon did much good, as well as evil.

Arriving as a series of noises and disturbances, the spirit remained for a year an unexplainable series of mysterious phenomena which the Bell family kept secret and referred to as "our family trouble." Strange gnawing noises troubled the children as they slept, beds moved, covers were jerked from sleepers in the night. Finally when the entire house shook vigorously for several minutes one night and as John Bell had begun to develop a nervous condition that prevented his swallowing, neighbors were called in for help. James Johnston and his wife came from their nearby farm to spend a night. They underwent similar experiences. More neighbors were called, and the spirit spoke for the first time. As the neighbors earnestly prayed for the Bells' release, the spirit repeated an earlier prayer of Johnston's in his exact voice. Thereafter the spirit was loqua-



cious. Preachers came from miles around; none of them could stump the voice in quoting Scripture. Now, with a very beautiful and sweet voice, the spirit joined in the singing at the weekly prayer meetings. It is referred to as feminine because of the beauty of its high soprano singing.

During the next three years (1817-1820), the spirit was active. It never materialized; or if it did, it was seen at a distance. Daughter Betsy claimed she saw a form riding a bent poplar. As word spread, others saw strange beings in the woods, but no doubt their imaginations were stimulated from the local stories. People came from far and wide to experience the phenomenon; "Ghost Chasers" and "Ghost Busters" arrived; the spirit never disappointed anyone. It prayed, or sang, or pinched, or pulled. A visiting scientist from England left as mystified as did the "Ghost Chaser." During these years the Bell family freely gave hospitality to as many visitors as could be accommodated in the home. Others camped in the surrounding pear orchard. Once General Andrew Jackson and his party rode up, planning to camp a week; but as they approached the farm late one evening, the wagon suddenly stopped. "What's the matter?" asked one. But the driver could not force the team forward. When one of the men finally said, "It's the Bell Witch," the carriage lurched ahead and a voice was heard to say, "I'll see you later, General Jackson." Jackson and his group returned to Nashville the next morning.

Literally thousands of similar legends exist. Many of them are documented in the diary kept by one of the sons, Richard Williams Bell, who along with John, Jr., Betsy, and several of the six children, was still living at the homeplace during these years. No doubt many or most of the stories grew from superstitious imaginations. But there can be no doubt that the visit of the spirit to the Bell family did occur.

The being seemed to have a quadruple purpose in its visit: to protect, to punish, to prevent, and to provide knowledge. Its mission was to four members of the Bell household: John, the father; Lucy, the mother; Betsy, the younger daughter; and John, Jr., the eldest son. Its pranks and appearances and public prayers were for the community at large: to provide credibility. It was a religious ghost; it knew Scripture; and it once provided an object lesson against avarice by sending a group of men to dig in a cave for buried gold and then laughed at them during evening prayers when they had returned empty-handed.

But to those four family members the demon turned her



close and earnest attentions. She was a protector to the mother, not that Lucy needed any physical or spiritual protection, for she was a great lady, loved and respected by the entire community and adored by her husband and family. But the ghost had a special attachment for Lucy, often singing her to sleep. The spirit nursed Lucy through the long bout with pleurisy and brought her the refreshing autumn grapes from the forest when she was burning with fever. In happier times, during afternoon Bible study meetings or at quilting parties, the demon showed her feminine nature by joining in the attendant gossip, often telling the ladies interesting facts about their neighbors and husbands. Too, she kept Lucy informed about her relatives in North Carolina. This practice led a few families to believe that the ghost had followed Lady Lucy from Edgecombe County and was herself a native North Carolinian. Mrs. Bell never antagonized the spirit, for she hoped her kindness would lead to easier treatment for the beleaguered husband and daughter. But to Lucy Bell the demon was nothing more than a comfort and a companion. Many of the community and John, Jr., felt the kind treatment resulted from a special grace from God that the loving lady possessed which protected her from harm.

To Betsy Bell, 12 years old when the spirit arrived, she had another relation: tormentor and preventer. During the four-year visitation, Betsy grew into young womanhood, and during these years she had but one beau, Joshua Gardner. The demon opposed this match. Over and over, after slapping and pulling, she would demand, "Don't marry Joshua Gardner!" Beautiful but persistent, Betsy continued the courtship. Custom held that at first snowfall all the courting-couples would go for an evening sleigh ride on one of the wagons used to slide the wood in from the forest. Once, when all the girls had seated themselves on the "sleigh" and were waiting for the boys to hitch up the horses, the sleigh started and of its own accord made three circles around the house. The boys then hitched the horses and the young people went on their ride. The spirit seemed to want to be kind to Betsy if only she would not persist in seeing Joshua Gardner. At a birthday party, unseen hands placed a large basket of exotic fruit before Betsy saying, "Those came from the West Indies. I brought them myself." After her father's death, Betsy was finally convinced that she must not marry Joshua. He released her and went to West Tennessee to live. During the final months of her stay, the demon held friendly conversations with Betsy. What kind



of a tragic marriage the witch foresaw can only be surmised. It is enough to know that Betsy married her former teacher, then in the Tennessee legislature, and they had a seventeen-year marriage that was blissful. Richard Powell protected his wife and took all cares on his shoulders. After his death she went to Mississippi and spent the remaining years of her life with a daughter. She died in 1890, aged 86.

To the father John Bell, the demon took a sterner attitude: persecuter. No one can explain why. John Bell at 65 was a most upright man: leader of his community, successful farmer, kind master of slaves, and respected father and husband. There was only one person in all the region who disliked him. Kate Batts claimed that John Bell had cheated her in a business deal. Kate Batts was an eccentric individual who lived near the Bell home and was known to have made threats as to his future. She was generally ridiculed for her malapropisms: When offered a seat in church, "No thank you, this is so consoling to my disposition that I feel amply corrugated. I'm a very plain woman, and do love to homigate near the altar when the Lord is making confugation among the sinners." (At the time she was sitting on a repenting sinner.) Some believed the ghost was in the hire of Kate Batts, who was still smarting from the business transaction of years ago.

From remaining records no one can imagine why the demon hated John Bell and chose to punish him most severely of all. His nerves were affected by the presence. After a year he began to fail and became progressively weaker. The incident with the shoes took place in October, 1820. After that harrowing experience he never left his house. On the morning of December 19, he was weak; and when a son went to the cupboard to get his medicine, he found a vial one-third full of dark-colored liquid that no one had seen before. The prescribed medicine was gone. The voice of the spirit was heard to say: "I put it there, and gave Old Jack a big dose . . . while he was fast asleep . . . ." John Bell died the following morning. As the dirt was being shoveled into his grave, the demon sang out, "Row me up some brandy, O," as if in celebration of retribution accomplished. Her mission seemed almost completed, for she left in the spring that followed.

John Bell, Jr., was an experienced young man during the four years of the demon's visits. He had been born in North Carolina in 1793 before his father had emigrated to Tennessee. He served with General Jackson during the Indian campaigns and was in the Battle of New Orleans when the British were



defeated. After the war he took up flatboating and hauled local produce to New Orleans for sale, usually at Christmas time. A stern man, six feet three inches in height, he was 24 when the demon arrived.

When the ghost began punishing Betsy, John, Jr., confronted it and offered to take Betsy's treatment. At this meeting the demon first revealed its mission to John: "There are many things I want to say to some human being with enough intelligence to understand." Then it named itself in speaking of its kind treatment to the mother: "She is protected from all wickedness by her goodness, . . . and always appreciative of the smallest tribute rendered her, even when extended to her by a *demon*."

Thereafter the demon had many conversations with John and became a philosophical guide to him and a revealer of things to come. The demon never used the word "God," but always spoke of the "Great Being" or "Uncreated Creator." But it continually talked of Christianity as the only salvation for the world.

During a snowfall shortly after the death of the father, the demon held its longest session with John. It told him that it was not wicked: "There are many living in the world today who are much more wicked than I." Man can not understand the Great Being; he must rely on faith: ". . . that unknown power can not be understood; accept it through faith," it said. Shortly after this meeting the demon left but promised to return in seven years.

When it reappeared in March, 1828, John was living on his own farm. This visit was short, but it was the one of prophecy. The demon predicted the Civil War: "There will be another Battle at New Orleans . . . . The city will be captured by a Tennessean [Admiral David G. Farragut]; he is an officer in the U.S. Navy now, but will be on the other side." And it told of more extensive struggles: "A great war . . . will likely involve nearly the whole world. The United States at that time will have become one of the world's greatest nations." The Great Depression was to follow: ". . . thousands actually will suffer from want of the necessities of life. Again, I am telling you that it can never recover except by a complete spiritual adjustment." The demon also knew of the World War II: it "will be far more devastating and fearful in character than the one the world thought too terrible for the mind to grasp."

In closing this last meeting with John, the demon spoke of an era to come which must be the one we are now entering:



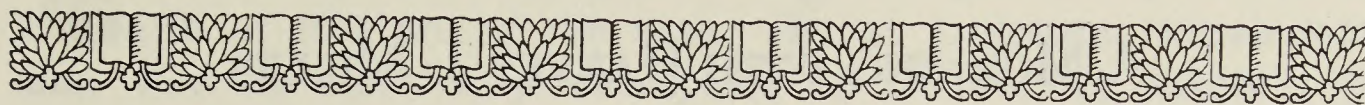
"There will come a time when the food growing conditions of the world will change, if the world is not destroyed before that time . . . . At that time men will heed nothing but science and finances, and the misery following will be fearful for you to contemplate . . . . The Great Uncreated Creator has these methods of showing men that he rules the world."

When the demon left after the death of the father, it promised the 1828 return just described, and also stated it would again descend on the Bells in 111 years, i.e., in 1935. In 1935, Dr. Charles Bailey Bell, the only living son of John, Jr.'s oldest son, was a brain specialist in Nashville. He anticipated the prediction by publishing the facts of the case as his grandfather had told them to his father, and as his father had passed them on to him. The 1934 work, *The Bell Witch*, is a rare and interesting volume, copyrighted by Charles Bailey Bell, M.D. As the title page bears no publisher's imprint, it was probably privately printed. Dr. Bell left no public record of a subsequent visitation. Meanwhile other volumes had been written. In 1894 a "Bell Witch history" by M.V. Ingram used the original diary of Richard Williams Bell. In 1930 Harriet Parks Miller discursively told the story in her 72-page monograph printed by the Leaf-Chronicle Publishing Company of Clarksville, Tennessee. In 1972 appeared—curiously indeed—a volume in paperback: a facsimile, without introduction or explanation, of both Charles Bailey Bell's *The Bell Witch* and Harriet Parks Miller's *The Bell Witch of Middle Tennessee*. On the title page is the imprint: "Charles Elder—Bookseller, Nashville, Tennessee." But the work is not listed in *Books in Print* and was apparently intended only for local distribution.

Why tell the tale again? Well, one good answer is that it's a mighty interesting yarn. The true purpose, though, has been to set straight, for me anyway, the chronology of the story. I grew up in Middle Tennessee and fished on the river and walked over the property of the Bell Farm. I heard the stories; and when I was in the third grade at Jere Baxter School, my mother read me Charles Bailey Bell's account, chapter by chapter as I ate my daily lunches. The various legends always fascinated me, but I never could get it "all straight." On a recent trip to Nashville, I came upon the facsimile on a Walgreen's magazine rack and decided to reread the story. Neither of the included pieces—no surprise to me—narrated the history in even vaguely chronological sequence.



Both are loosely joined series of anecdotes. My retelling of a few of the many episodes is with some hope of bringing into order the events that have often been recorded. The words of the demon come from Charles Bailey Bell's recollections of his father's story. The episode of Kate Batts is found in Harriet Parks Miller's work.



**TALES ALONG THE ROANOKE** is a new book containing 46 stories from Bear Grass and other communities in the Jamesville and Williamston area. They range in time from the Colonial period to the present. The author is Louise R. Booker, whose previous books of folklore delighted us, as do these 80 pages of "Historical and Traditional Lore." Order from Mrs. W. H. Booker, 204 East Liberty Street, Williamston, N.C. 27892. The price \$4.25 includes tax, postage, and handling charges.

**THE FOLKLORE OF TEXAN CULTURES**, edited by Francis E. Abernethy (Encino Press, Austin, 366 pages, \$12.50) is a running account of the various racial strains which have populated that big state—Indians, Czechs, Mexicans, and so on. There are handsome photographs and cuts to illustrate the text. We wish North Carolina could have a book like this, but we just don't have enough variety here. Meanwhile, hooray for multiracial Texas, where everything happens!

**ARKANSAS FOLKLORE: THE ARKANSAS TRAVELER, DAVEY CROCKETT, AND OTHER LEGENDS** (Rose Pub., Co., 301 Louisiana, Little Rock, Ark. 72201, 443 pages, \$12.95), by James Masterson, is a facsimile reprint of the 1942 volume then titled *Tall Tales of Arkansas*, a classic of its genre. Songs, jokes, fables, stories, and other types of folklore are written up with scholarly care, but always in such a way as to please the arm-chair folklorist. Of course, it never occurred to us that Arkansas wasn't one of the most folkloric states in the Union, and here is convincing evidence.

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John Q. Anderson, professor emeritus of English at the University of Houston, died on February 19, 1975. Among other books, he was author of *With the Bark On: Popular Humor of the Old South, 1830-1860* (1967). He had contributed several articles to our *Journal*, had a Ph.D. from the University at Chapel Hill, and was a Life Member of the North Carolina Folklore Society.





## A MORNING WITH HARVEY J. MILLER

by G. Forrest Grindstaff

The Western North Carolina mountains are among the last places where one can still find remnants of what the country was like in culture and traditions before the massive growth of technocracy and urbanization. *Remnants* are all, unfortunately; the old ways are not still practiced by most mountain people and are remembered only as something grandmother or grandfather used to do or tell. Fragments abound as incidental, unused, and in some cases unwanted knowledge. "Back in the old days" is sometimes sighed nostalgically, but for the most part the hardships of mountain life for children of the Great and pre-Great Depression eras hold no special attraction. Generally the folklore that now exists is remembered by the older people, since because of the few industries in the area, the young move away to the cities to get jobs. Thus the average age of the population is higher than that of the rest of North Carolina. Though tourism is becoming a major source of income, most of the people still make their living by subsistence farming or mining. Religion remains a potent influence in most lives.

I grew up in Mitchell County, with easy access to Grandfather Mountain, Mt. Mitchell, and Roan Mountain. An outsider might assume that the area would abound in folklore, but I can't remember any distinctive folk customs, other than those I picked up from reading the John Parris column in the *Asheville Citizen-Times*. Only after I moved away to Chapel Hill did I begin to get a feeling, an attraction, for what was left behind.



‡ The author, born in Bakersville in 1952, is a senior at UNC-CH majoring in mathematics education. This paper was written for the Folk Narrative course (Folklore 186) taught by Dr. Charles Zug.



Luckily, my mother began sending me columns from the *Tri-County News* (covering Mitchell, Avery, and Yancey counties), written by Harvey J. Miller, whose daughter I knew from four years of high school. His writing style was oral in nature, with long run-on sentences and little use of punctuation. At times I was reminded of William Faulkner. After following his column over a period of months, I began to get an impression of a wealth of folklore in the area, almost forgotten, which this man was in some way attempting to revive. My interest in meeting him increased markedly, and after two letters and a phone call, I arranged for an interview on the morning of March 14, 1974.

Harvey J. Miller lives in Tipton Hill. I had been told by a neighbor to take the first gravel road on the right before Tipton Hill School, near Bakersville, and I soon located his house, the third one on the right, by the large mailbox with the names of the four Millers painted on it. It was a comfortable home, with a large porch and swing near the doorway. Before I was halfway out of my car and into the clear frosty morning, Mr. Miller had come out onto the porch in a pair of new Liberty overalls, offering his hand while we both introduced ourselves. I was invited in. We sat on either end of a loudly ticking clock, with his daughter Ethel on the other side of the room.

Mr. Miller, 65, has few grey hairs. His friendly voice is a cross between those of Hal Holbrook's Mark Twain and Ray Hicks from Beach Mountain. He mentioned with pride that the people from *Foxfire* had just the week before completed a six-hour tape of him and were further planning to do a book. Also he, Ethel (who quit her job as a secretary to assist), and John Ehle, the well-known North Carolina writer, are now working on a book containing most of his previous newspaper writings from the *Ervin Record* and the *Tri-County News*. We were both initially somewhat nervous about the idea of using a tape recorder, but during the course of our conversation of over two hours, this fear faded away amid the ticking and chiming of the mantle clock and the sounds of dogs and chickens outside. Later in the morning his brother Fonzer came in to listen with a look on his face that said he'd heard it all before.

First I inquired into his biography, particularly with regard to where he had heard his tales and how he first got started in newspaper writing. He was born on July 10, 1909, on Pigeon Roost Creek. According to him, the midwife at his birth, Aunt Ellen Miller, asked only for a peck of onions and not her usual



\$2.50 fee, the reason being his small size, 2½ pounds. No one expected him to live, but luckily it was a warm July and his parents built a large fire and laid him on a feather bed close to it, a sort of incubator. In the end he turned out to be a larger man than any of his brothers.

At about age twelve he acquired a squirrel dog named Mack that, it was reported, climbed a tree 35 feet high and jumped down unhurt. A sister who lived in Ervin, Tennessee, brought him a copy of the *Johnson City Staff News*, the first daily newspaper he had ever read. He got an idea that such an amazing dog as Mack should not go unknown; so one night he sat down and wrote out a brief story about Mack and mailed it next morning to the newspaper. In four or five days the editor wrote back, complimented him, requested more dog stories, appointed him news correspondent for the area, and included a cutout of his first dog story which had already appeared on the front page. Since the publication of that first story Mr. Miller said that he has written in "a hundred different papers."

Several of Mr. Miller's tales have come from his mother, Mrs. Cinda Barnett Miller. Though illiterate, she had an excellent memory and remembered and repeated most of the tales she heard from friends or relatives. The local get-togethers to make pennyroyal—a drink distilled from a raw herb through a straight iron pipe, shoe strings from hides, or thirty gallons of apple butter—undoubtedly provided an opportunity for Mrs. Miller to tell and hear many tales which she later repeated. The setting, as Mr. Miller describes it, resembled closely that of Maude Long's childhood, when stories were told almost every night as the children gathered around the fireplace while Mrs. Miller knitted socks or made quilts. With only oil lamps, the atmosphere was provided for various supernatural tales. Mr. Miller copied down a few, but memorized most of the ones he heard. In two of these he took an active role. As can be seen, tale-telling was one way to make children behave, although by techniques not often used now. Here are the tales of **Pelts-Nickel** and the **Fire-Eyed Cat** as related by Mr. Miller:

Well, when I wuz a little boy, back when they wuz a baby was bein' born in different places, they'd come 'n' get my mother—she wadn't a midwife but she'd help 'n deliverin' the babies—an' they'd come 'n' get her 'n' they'd go on horses back in them hollers, where she'd walk. One night there they come—somebody come—wanted her to go up thar to the Hardin neighbor's house an' well, I didn't want her to go that night.

I uz a little boy, small, 'n' didn't want her to go. I uz a



cryin', 'n' muh daddy told me, said, "Harvey, you'd better hush cryin', somethin' or another'll come here." I kept on cryin' and I heard somethin' or nother poppin' on the door, like somebody beatin' with a switch, 'n' they said, somebody told 'em, said that wuz a-law, when I heard that, I crawled down under the cover 'n' hushed 'n' cried. They said, "It's Pelts-Nickel."

Well, I got the story on that after then, an' they said they wuz a-if they hear children cryin', they wuz a-they called it Pelts-Nickel, would come 'n' wup 'em, 'n' after then when they'd mention about the Pelts-Nickel, I'd try to be a better boy. Heh! Heh!

One night we's sittin' around the fire and muh nephew was there 'n' he wuz pretty mean 'n' my mother kept tellin' him, "If you don't," says, "quieten down," says, "get better," says, "that ole Fire-Eyed Cat," said, "you'll see that ole Fire-Eyed Cat," 'n', well, we's settin' there 'n' he got, an' we heard a noise back in the other room, an' she said, "I guess that's him a-comin'," 'N' he run an' jumped in my lap, 'n' here come an ole cat out of the other room an' uh, and she said, "That's uh, Fire-Eyed Cat," looked like fire jumpin' out o' that cat's eyes an' he went so fast, looked like fire wuz a comin'-a-jumpin' off its back.

Oh, it scared that boy, 'n' his mother said, "You'd better be good, or there'll be another Fire-Eyed Cat." It uz a-goin' so fast that little boy never realized what it was. Heh! Heh! 'N' she said, "You'd better be good or there'll be another Fire-Eyed Cat go through here, heh!"

There is a similarity between the creatures of these two tales and "Old Buck" at Rodanthe on North Carolina's Outer Banks. Old Buck, or "the Wild Bull of Trent Woods," appears at Christmas festivals when two men under a blanket prance about holding up a cow's head with horns. The bad children shout, "Caper, Buck!" until he flees. This is said to be related to certain Christmas festivals in Denmark and Norway, in which a large buck appears to frighten the wicked children. (Richard Walser, "Rodanthe's Old Buck," *North Carolina Folklore* 19, 1971, p. 135.)

Another story from Mr. Miller's childhood is **The Legend of Hat-A-Rock Hill**, which he considers as his best tale. It concerns a hatter who moved into the Tipton Hill vicinity and built his shack under a large overhanging rock on what is now known as Hat-A-Rock Hill. No one knew his origins. One day he was found hanging from a tree near his shack—the work of a posse, in retribution for a murder the Hatter had committed elsewhere. Soon afterwards, strange things began to be seen in the area of the Hill. As a child, Mr. Miller himself reports hav-



ing observed a little man (the Hatter?) with a freely revolving head sitting by the side of the road on top of Hat-A-Rock Hill.

Mr. Miller lived in Pigeon Roost community until fifteen years ago, when he moved to Tipton Hill community, never having had any occupation but farming, and of course, writing and collecting folklore. Another source of tales over the years has been his neighbors. He goes visiting quite often and is able to hear tales such as that of **The Turkey Witch**. This tale, regarded as an actual event by most of the residents of Pigeon Roost, came from elderly local people and concerns the alleged ability of the late Aunt Phoebe Lingerfelt, known as The Old Witch Woman, to turn herself into a wild turkey at will, to cast spells and cause general bad luck. The hero of the tale, Hunt Miller, supposedly moved away from Mitchell County to Georgia about 1902, the same year in which Aunt Phoebe died. When alive, she reportedly wandered around the woods and fields, but after her "accident" she stayed at home in her cabin. The tale as related by Mr. Miller goes like this:

Yeh, there uz back in a place they called Turkey Cove where a lot o' wild turkeys and that uz the way people kept—had a lot o' meat, they'd kill these turkeys and they'd go out—my grandfather would go out—he'd dress in white and had them old—them thar old hog rifles, you know, had to reload 'em, when you shoot, why, you'd have to reload 'em. One time he brought in an old turkey gobbler. He wuz a big man and he had it swung across his back and its head reached—drug along, it uz so big.

And they uz a, yeh, man lived there, close to that holler called Turkey Cove, where he killed his turkeys. He went in thar and there uz an old turkey hen just botherin' him all the time, come around clost. He got t' shootin' at it, heh, heh, he couldn't kill it—a-tall.

And he'd knowed they uz a woman in that section and she wuz a witch, and he went and somebody told him said, "Melt and make ye a silver bullet," said, "you'll stop that, you won't be bothered," said, "that's a witch." And he did. He got him a silver bullet, 'n' went in thar and daylight, gettin' day good and here come that ole turkey hen right—doin' her prancin' around and squawkin', and he took good aim at it, and he shot. When he shot, why, it fell over and flopped down the hill and he went on. It uz disappeared and he knowed it uz hit, but he went on home that time he didn't kill any.

And, see, that bothered him so he couldn't kill any turkeys a-tall, and he went home, he heard that ole Phoebe Lingerfelt, heard she wuz in bed and was down with the rheumatism and couldn't get outa bed, heh! And it come to 'is mind it—she—wuz a turkey witch he'd shot. Heh! heh!

In a few days she out a-limpin' around and all the time she



lived she allers limped. And he went back to his old ammunition and never was bothered with a turkey witch no more. Heh! heh! That's the way to kill a turkey witch, to shoot 'em with a silver bullet. Heh! heh!

(G211.4.3 Witch in form of heath hen. G211.4 Witch in the form of a bird. G275.12 Witch in form of animal is injured or killed as a result of injury to the animal. The witch's body suffers an injury identical to the animal.)

One variant of this tale includes a witch man instead of a witch woman, though when transformed is still a turkey gobbler which perches on a tree limb above the hunter's head. In the end the turkey witch is not even wounded but grows apprehensive and flies away. Another variant concerns a witch woman who transforms herself into a doe deer which is eventually mortally wounded (as is the witch) by the hunter's silver bullet. (F. Roy Johnson, *Witches and Demons in History and Folklore*, 1969, p. 202.) Still another variant is the North Carolina tale, "Vera Gilberts and Her Witchcraft," concerning an old witch woman who turned herself into a squirrel and was shot in the eye by a hunter (*Brown Collection*, I, 644).

Mr. Miller also mentioned learning about witch marks (which he still uses) from his mother. These are star-shaped figures which are hung up over the inside of the front door to ward off witches. (G272.2.1 Piece of rowan put above house door.) Although he wouldn't mention the man's name, there is also a local legend about a warlock who, if he grew angry with you, would make your cow go dry and who, supposedly through supernatural powers, always arranged for things to work for his benefit. (D2083.1 Cows magically made dry.) In many tales, witches are accused of magically milking cows.

Mr. Miller did not seem like a prejudiced person and I feel that he is not, but I received two very good ethnic jokes from him. One, told by his daughter Ethel because of his lapse of memory, was about an Irishman who destroyed a gold watch, mistaking it for a tick (insect). (X691.4.1 Irishman without brain. J1772.21 Watch is mistaken for sea tick, Type 1321.) Another, learned from a railroad doctor, was about Italians brought in to build the Clinchfield Railroad through the area many years ago. (Interestingly enough, neither Italians nor Irishmen settled in Mitchell County.)

Well, uh, now, they wuz what we call transit. Well, they brought 'em in here, you know to—they'd get them that cheap labor, they called it, they's buildin' the Clinchfield. They



called it back then C.C. and O. Railroad. They's buildin' it down through the gorge 'n' O-Obie Rock 'n' through thar. You know, they'd string out hands in different places, and they had them to a place 'n' that thar Doctor Cooper, he told me, uh, this story and he said one day they come and told 'im, "We've got some sick Eye-talian men down thar, I don't know," said, "they act like they've about dead," said, he got his satchel o' medicine, walked down thar on the river, went in a shanty car and he said thar they wuz, said, awful sick, said, quick as he looked at 'em, looked at their eyes, he, he seen they's poisoned, you know, on somepin'.

So he went up 'n' talked, said, they couldn't understand 'em much and said he did understand (about what he pieced together) eatin' a bird, a big bird 'n' said they wuz out that Sunday, 'n' some of 'em 'n' they found a bird and they called it a bird, said, they eat that, cooked it out an' that 'uz on Monday they uz sick, bad sick. 'N' he says he give 'em the medicine, said he told that, uh, man thar, wuz a thar runnin' that clinic, worked thar at that shanty car, told 'im to see if they did take that medicine.

He says he, uh, walked up the railroad 'n' seen an ole farmer thar, said he said, uh, he asked that farmer what he uz doin', said he said, "Well," he said, "the crows been a-takin' my corn up," 'n' he said, "I put a little poison out," and well, he found out then, said them Eye-talians would eat any kind, they's crazy 'bout a bird 'n' they didn't exactly know. He'd found out after then that they'd eat a crow, said they'd just eat any kinda meat that way, a bird.

Needless to say, to eat a crow is a very foolish thing to do, from the view of the mountain people. I wonder why this tale had not been used to explain the origin of the saying "to eat crow." Both of these yarns are very much akin to the contemporary ethnic jokes in their imputing of stupidity to members of minority groups.

Another tale springing from the building of the Clinchfield Railroad is **Black Dog at Obie Rock**. It seems that railroad workers in the area of Obie Rock would report being followed by a mysterious black dog as they passed through. Some said it was a ghost of a black dog, starved to death by loyally remaining for days beside its master who died while hunting at Obie Rock. Since the completion of the railroad the dog has not been seen. (E332.2 Ghost walks with traveler in silence, E423.1.1.1 Ghostly black dog.) This tale is very similar to another North Carolina tale, "The Headless Dog of Bushy Fork," in which a ghost dog followed travelers past a certain schoolhouse. (*Brown Collection*, I, 682.)

Besides being a collector of tales Mr. Miller is also know-



ledgeable of the etiological origins of place names in the area. For example, Pumpkin Patch Mountain comes from the large pumpkin-shaped rocks on the slopes of the mountain. Pigeon Roost community comes from the large numbers of carrier pigeons that would roost at night in the chestnut trees there. Devil's Nest Mountain is a Blue Ridge peak whose very name is a reminder of the power of Old Satan in the lives of the mountain people. It is said to hold a cave to which babies were reportedly carried by eagles. It was also said to be the lair of a wild man who came down at night and ate cattle, leaving his footprints. The village of Relief comes from a medicine called Heart's Relief, sold in a store there and patented by a Dr. Heart. "Goin' to get a bottle of Heart's Relief" was misunderstood as "Goin' to Relief." Booger Hollow comes from the noises which people, including Mr. Miller himself, have heard under the ground. Bad Creek comes from the unsavory reputation of a place where lived a scoundrel who had the hat of every man he had ever killed. Dead Man Hollow comes from a place where many men who have disappeared are suspected of being buried. Lost Cove, an isolated community, is now evacuated because of a TB epidemic. Last, there is the nameless hollow where "the Devil fell down 'n' broke his apron strings . . . spilled his wares" because of the many small stones lying on the ground. (A977.3.1 Devil carrying apron load of stones for building drops them when apron string breaks).

Mr. Miller also went into numerous tales such as **The Hanging of Murderous Mary** in which an elephant was strung up by a crane until dead for the crime of stomping a man to death. Supposedly, a crane was used because no available guns were effective in even wounding her. There is some question in my mind as to the truth or falsity of this tale, though Mr. Miller tells it as true. In one newspaper publication of the tale, there was a very badly reproduced photograph of what appeared to be an elephant hanging from a crane, which still leaves me unconvinced.

There is also the story of **Pigeon Roost Pete**, an unsolved murder tale which supposes that a man, Pete Honneycut, shot his beautiful wife through her breastpin, left the country, but returned as an old man many years later to make sure that she was really dead. Reportedly he slept before the fire like an Indian, was followed by a posse the next day and, because he was never seen again, was presumed hanged by his wife's kinfolk. Undoubtedly there are many more tales that Mr. Miller



knows that I did not hear, and for reasons of being asked to remember them over tape, did not come to his mind. I'm sure he thought of many he could have told after I had paid him a small sum for his time, and had driven away.

Harvey J. Miller, though not a professionally trained writer, has an excellent memory, and the ability to write down tales almost exactly as he hears them and to compose creative pieces about the people and customs that he sees around him. In his newspaper writing no one particular type of tale predominates. His writing style is in a less oral form now than when I first started reading his column, and in a way this is unfortunate. One cannot really be sure how much of his oral material has been "contaminated" with literary materials. Occasionally his daughter Ethel will write a piece for him, and the contrast of styles is quite evident. Although he has been accused by some locals as being a busybody and a gossip, he will probably never cease serving as a "repository" or "collecting receptacle" of tales which are fast dying out as the Land of Oz at the Beech Mountain resort nearby moves in to take their place. He is forced to do alone what his parents and grandparents and everyone of their time did collectively, to preserve the old traditions, except now only a few care at all about their preservation. He is truly a unique man, one of the last of his kind.

---

**Bubby Pod?** Ever heard of it? It is a shrub indigenous to North Carolina and adjoining states. Though its scientific name is *Calycanthus floridus* (variety: *floridus* or *fertilis*), it has a number of common names: bubby blossom, bubby bush, sweet shrub, strawberry bush, sweet bubby, and Carolina allspice. When the flower is mature, it has a strawberry-like odor, attracting beetles which pollinate it. Folk medicine has it that the expressed juice of the blossoms is used for earache. Another folk usage, for women exclusively, is to place the blossom in the bodice where it serves as a perfume. The seed pod resembles the pendulous human breast, hence the name bubby pod. Its common name, Carolina allspice, suggests its possible use in cooking. Now writing a dissertation on the plant is Jeffrey H. McCormack (Box U-42, Botany Section, Biological Sciences Group, University of Connecticut, Storrs, Conn. 06268), who would like to have *Journal* readers send him other folklore about the plant.

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The Folklore Collection of Virgil L. Sturgill (102 Tacoma Circle, Asheville), former vice president of the North Carolina Folklore Society, is being turned over to Appalachian State University, where future generations of folklorists and "folk-nicks" will be able to consult his copious records, tapes, and books.







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# NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL









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LEONIDAS BETTS, editor

Mrs. Deborah Merkel, editorial assistant

Mrs. Joan Sanchez, VariTypist

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Peter Stuart Ney, A Schoolteacher, <i>Harry C. West</i> . . . . .	67
Discovered: A Sixth Fool Killer Letter, <i>Tom Parramore</i> . . .	70
Folktales from the Institute at Duke, <i>Mac E. Barrick</i> . . . . .	75
The Tragic Ballad of Miss Emma Hartsell, <i>Jan A. Herlocker</i>	82
The Imitating Monkey: A Folktale Motif in Poe, <i>Charles Clay Doyle</i> . . . . .	89
Folklore and Travel in Mexico and Guatemala, <i>The Editor</i> . .	93

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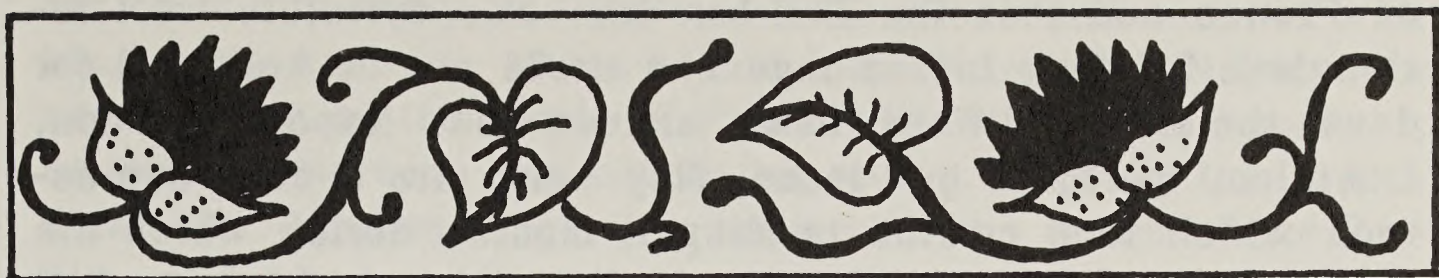
**ARTS COUNCIL GRANT.** Again this year the North Carolina Arts Council has awarded the *Journal* a generous grant to promote and enhance our publication. Past awards have done much to help in our work, especially in encouraging young Tar Heel writers.

This year's grant will make possible another college student contest. North Carolina undergraduates enrolled during spring and fall of 1975 and spring of 1976 will be eligible. Cash prizes will be awarded to winning articles, and a special issue will be published to showcase student work. Details will appear in the next issue of *NCFJ*, and colleges and universities across the state will receive formal notification of regulations in the fall.

**RECIPES FOR FOLK FOODS SOLICITED.** We rarely hear directly from our members. That's a shame. Many of you surely have valuable bits of folklore that you'd like to share with everyone. We receive long articles, and for those we are grateful. But we always need good "filler" materials. Family recipes come to mind right off. Perhaps you possess some treasured formula you'd be willing to publish. In coming issues we want to feature family recipes for good, old-fashioned dishes. Let's keep our North Carolina traditions alive! Take a few moments to write us. An interesting anecdote or information about your recipe would add spice to your contribution.

**BRIEFS.** The annual meeting of the North Carolina Folklore Society will be held at the Hotel Sir Walter in Raleigh on Friday, November 7. Details will be given in our next issue . . . . Last spring, a New Jersey businessman saw "a large monster moving in the waters off an old mill pond just outside Trenton" in Jones County. Its head was underwater, but its slick, shiny, humped back protruded above the surface, and it looked like a Brontosaurus, he said. Sheriff Wesley Mallard commented that he's never seen anything in the pond but fish and ducks. . . . One hundred thousand people attended the 51st Old Time Fiddlers Convention at Union Grove last Easter. . . . The rejuvenated Virginia Folklore Society now has 125 members, but needs four times that many to support a journal, reports a recent newsletter from Charlottesville. . . . The Collection of Ohio Popular Beliefs and Superstitions, slated for publication, is the greatest collection ever made for a single area anywhere in the world and, when edited, "will be more than twice as large, in bulk," as North Carolina's *Brown Collection*. . . . Sadly do we note the death of Jan Philip Schinhan at the age of 87. Professor Schinhan edited "The Music of the Ballads" (1957) and "The Music of the Folk Songs" (1962). volumes IV and V of the *Brown Collection*.





## PETER STUART NEY, A SCHOOLTEACHER

by Harry C. West

The isolated and relatively poor farming districts of Rowan, Davie, Iredell, and Lincoln counties are the unlikely setting for a romantic and fascinating tale of a country schoolmaster named Peter Stuart Ney. Ney came to North Carolina in the early 1820s after a few years' sojourn in the Low Country of South Carolina. A man with bright red hair and several obvious scars evincing a fiery battling nature, Ney contented himself to work for a meager salary gathered as tuition from the families whose children he taught. He depended upon those same families to provide him room and board.

Yet it seemed to many that a man with such an imperious carriage and such personal dignity, a man so apparently self-possessed and so obviously cultivated, should be more ambitious than to work for \$200 per year. Others who knew him felt that he was biding his time, that he had his eyes on other things, that teaching was simply a means of providing him a livelihood until he could accomplish another and grander design. His evident distraction and his propensity for writing to late hours at night in some secret journal kept alive rumors that he had much to reveal at some later date. And his voracious reading of newspapers, especially the news from Europe, suggested that he had an active interest in matters far beyond the confines of Piedmont North Carolina.

Indeed the man's behavior was strange. For instance, when news arrived that Napoleon had died, he fainted dead away in his classroom, dismissed classes when he was revived, and that night attempted suicide. In 1830, on learning that Louis Philippe, Duke of Orleans, had ascended to the throne

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‡ *The secretary-treasurer of the North Carolina Folklore Society has based this brief account on LeGette Blythe's biography Marshal Ney: A Dual Life (1937).*



of France and that the Bourbon line was therefore well entrenched, he flew into a rage and could not be consoled for days thereafter. When news arrived that Napoleon's son, L'Aiglon, had died in Vienna, Ney went into a deep depression which took months to dispel, months during which his



friends feared he would try to kill himself, for he declared that he had nothing to live for anymore.

It was also known that he loved to drill the militia that gathered monthly for training at the Third Creek Presbyterian Church in Rowan County. He was known as an accomplished flautist and as a writer of respectable occasional poetry. Once, when a French fencing instructor came to Mocksville looking for pupils who might be taught the gentlemanly art of self-defense, one of Ney's students,

who had often fenced with Ney using cornstalks, arranged a meeting between Ney and the swordsman. And, true to the expectations of the students, Ney humiliated the Frenchman, who could not account for the existence in Mocksville of a superior swordsman forty years his senior.

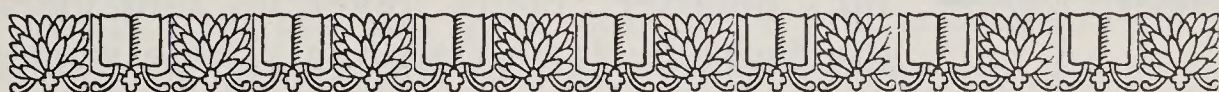
Finally, those who lent Ney books knew him as a mischief-maker who defaced the pages of French histories with copious marginalia, declaring this or that false and this or that true, substituting his own versions of recent French history, and in one known instance, correcting the portrait engraving of a famous French marshal.

After his death in Rowan County on November 15, 1846, many of Ney's former students and their parents came forward with tales which seem too wild to be anything but legends. To at least one student in each of the schools in which he taught, Ney had declared that he was not Peter Stuart Ney, Scottish schoolteacher, but in fact was a French refugee, a loyal supporter of Napoleon Bonaparte, indeed was the chief lieutenant of Napoleon: Michel Ney, Marshal of France, Duke of Elchingen, Prince of the Moskowa. He revealed that contrary to common belief in France, he had not been executed before a firing squad in the Gardens of the Luxembourg on December 7, 1815, but had in fact staged the execution with the help of loyal soldiers—even with the help, some say, of a fellow Mason and



his chief adversary, the Duke of Wellington!—and escaped with his life to America, where he hid himself to await Napoleon's next attempt on the throne of France. His distracted demeanor, so often observed, was attributed to his brooding long hours about the Bourbon kings, his hoping for the return of the Empire, and his dreaming of a reunion with his wife and sons in Paris. Most of these revelations came when he was delirious with fever or after long bouts of drinking.

There are strange congruences in Ney's confessed identity and in the person of Marshal Michel Ney. The men resembled each other in size and bearing. Both had bright red hair; indeed, Ney was known affectionately to his men as Red Peter Ney. Both had livid scar tissue on the left side of the face, extending from a deep depression in the skull above the ear to the lower jawbone. Both had gunshot wounds. And both had scars on the chest that were reputed to be those made by the steel-shod hooves of horses. Handwriting experts have attested that the penmanship of both men was that of one hand. Finally, Peter Stuart Ney's death was witnessed by at least three persons, all of whom reported that his last words were, "I will not die with a lie on my lips. I am Marshal Ney of France!"



**SEA CHEST** is that lively folklore magazine from down at Cape Hatteras. In a recent issue was a short piece about "Blackbeard in New Bern." It's only \$5.50 for a year's subscription of three issues to Seachest, Cape Hatteras School, Box 278, Buxton, N.C. 27920.

**STORIES OF THE OLD CHEROKEES** (112 pages) is, according to editor F. Roy Johnson (Murfreesboro, N.C. 27855, no price given), based on material from James Mooney and others, with illustrations by Mr. Johnson's 13-year-old grandson. Among the "Sacred Stories" are the First Fire, the Origin of Corn, and the Great Frog. Those amazing Little People, the Yunwi Tsunsdi, are told about in the group of "Wonder Stories," along with the Slant-Eyed Giant and the Man Who Married the Thunder's Sister. "Monster Stories" include those about the serpent Uktena, the Green-Winged Hornet, and the Water Cannibals. Notes and explanations are plentiful. This is an excellent book for young folklorists as well as the old-timers. . . . Mr. Johnson has also reissued **THE WHITE DOE: THE FATE OF VIRGINIA DARE** (1901) by Sallie Southall Cotten, a narrative poem in the meter of Longfellow's *Hiawatha*. This is the fascinating legend of Indian sorcery and two magic arrows, one of mussel-pearl and one of silver.





## DISCOVERED : A SIXTH FOOL KILLER LETTER

by Tom Parramore

The Fool Killer is probably North Carolina's most notable contribution to the gallery of American folk heroes. He was a little fellow (according to an 1857 woodcut of him) with a long-tail coat, a floppy hat, and a big club. And though his avowed aim was to inflict his own brand of crude but well-merited justice upon the many different sorts of fools in mid-19th-century North Carolina society, his business was never done. He slathered them and "mauled the goose grease" out of them, and split them from "chin to shin," but his powerful "jodarter" could never be laid upon all the fools in North Carolina. There were simply too many of them.



Jesse Holmes the Fool Killer was the fictional creation of Charles Napoleon Bonaparte Evans, editor from 1841 to 1883 of the weekly *Milton Chronicle* in Caswell County. Five letters, written of course by Evans but purporting to be communications from Jesse Holmes, have previously been located in the scattered extant issues of the *Chronicle*. Fortunately, other editors cherished the Fool Killer and copied his epistles in their own newspapers. A recently discovered sixth letter, reprinted from a lost issue of the *Chronicle*, appeared in the *Torch-Light* of Oxford in 1877.

Further tribute to Evans's ingenious little firebrand is an original letter in the *Torch-Light* by Jesse Holmes, Jr. the Fool Slayer, "Son of the old man." It was probably written by *Torch-Light* editor W. A. Davis.

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‡ Professor of History at Meredith College, the author (5012 Tanglewood Drive, Raleigh 27612) contributed "Gouging in Early North Carolina" for the May 1974 issue of the Journal.



The sixth letter finds the Fool Killer in a dark mood, relentlessly pursuing upstarts, skinflints, meddling parents, wayward youth, and others through various sections of Caswell and Person counties. His "son," the Fool Slayer, emerges to provide similar services in an area not lately visited by his "old man" and therefore requiring some additional "mauling" for the local fools.

\* \* \*

## LETTER FROM THE FOOL KILLER

Sitting on Somebody's Gate-post,  
I don't know where, August 1877.

*Editor:*—I am almost ready to despair, throw down my club and hie to my sequestered cave where the face of man cannot be seen. I see so much to disgust, so little to admire and so much to despise that I would to God I had never been born. Three rascals leap up for every one I slather, and fools dot the earth as the sands cluster old ocean's shore. But they are all wise, wonderfully wise—in their own estimation! the wisest being the biggest fool. And then there is so much deceit, hypocrisy, and villainy decked in the habiliments of virtue and righteousness, that my eye sickens at the sight and this pen falters to record. Do not understand me to maintain that "there are none good"—I do no such thing! but they are too few. Editor, come with me and look out for a few minutes upon this cold-hearted, lying, cheating and deceptive world: Do you see that chap strutting in a stove-pipe beaver, with stand-up collar, putting on consequential airs, and splerging around like a millionaire? He would be an aristocrat! the fault is not his that he is not! And yet I knew that lark when he and all his folks together couldn't drum up a blue black herring for breakfast. He was then clad in rags, knee-deep in ashes and as humble as a dog. But the fickle god of fortune made a blunder and favored him; by hook or by crook he made more money than brains, and you now see him a first-class "swell." He knows no poor relations! His daughters are "too good" to be caught dancing with honest and intelligent mechanics by far his superior intellectually and morally. Look at his "airs!" See how he swells! Hear his "big talk!" Does it not disgust you? Editor, listen at the old man: This chap is the living, moving type of the biggest swells of the age, and if their intelligence equalled their vanity and presumption, Solomon's wisdom would be eclipsed! Look at the vanity, the pride, the deceit, the ingratitude of mankind, his pomposity, toadyism, spanielism, selfishness and rascality well may we exclaim "how vain and how false are all things here below."

But to my maulings:

Hearing that the ladies of Yanceyville were to have a Tableau exhibition for the benefit of the Baptist Church, I armed



myself with a new club and proceeded thither to keep order. Arriving there late in the night and finding all quiet while the Exhibition went on up-stairs in the court-house, I walked over the court house yard looking at the beautiful maple shade trees, and as I stood gazing in admiration on one fronting the court house I heard a lark laughing in the tree, and peeping through the thick foliage I described a man up there peeping at the 'show' through a window and enjoying the fun. Taking him for a "fifteenth amendment"<sup>1</sup> who had no 'quarter' to pay his way or who was too economical to make the investment, I ordered him down; he descended in double-quick time when lo! he proved to be a white man! too stingy to give a quarter to the church—he was coated from head to foot with the offal of not less than fifty thousand little birds called martins that roosted in the top of the tree, and collaring him I made him dance to the tune of "get over double-trouble."<sup>2</sup> The Tableaux over I interviewed the Lawyers of the town, my old friends Bob Graves,<sup>3</sup> N. P. Oliver<sup>4</sup> and others, all of whom assured me of a week's hard work in that place and besought me to pitch camp, pull off my coat and "go" for subjects, but I had to "push-along, keep moving."

Peeping into a meeting-house, no matter where, while a protract'd meeting was going on, I described three or four of the brethren trying to arouse an old brother who went fast asleep while brother J—prayed a prayer equalled only by my old friend Chas. Butt,<sup>5</sup> who has been known to knock the shingles off a house. My Reverend friend, who is a great temperance advocate and a most excellent man, couldn't be roused up until I dealt him a jodarter.<sup>6</sup>

Near Holloway's X Roads<sup>7</sup> I caught a young man who slept in a store & which the rogues broke into & robbed while he laid in bed listening to the noise they kept, under the impression that it was rats. The plea was too thin! and recognizing him as the same lark whom I caught dodging in the bushes with a gun in hand and the perspiration streaming from him, trying to shoot a goat which he mistook for a bear, and having heard of him at a certain church thanking the preacher (in a voice heard all over the church) for concluding his sermon, I claimed the chap for my meat and mauled the goose grease out of him.

Not far from Smith & Scott's sawmill in Person,<sup>8</sup> I was startled by the cries of a girl in a log cabin and rushing to the house I was met by the weeping daughter wringing her hands in great agony. I demanded an explanation when she said her mother had taken a knife and gone off to an old house to kill herself because she wanted to go home with brother Sam. I crept down to the old house and peeping in descried the woman sawing on her throat with a dull case knife. Leaping forward I disarmed her and asked what it meant? She said "she'd be derved if her 'dater' went home with Sam if she didn't kill herself, because she wanted her to stay at home and marry John, and if she went off with Sam it would brake up the match." Says I, "old gal, you may fool your daughter you can't fool me! You



sawed your throat with the back of the knife and had no notion of killing yourself—your object was to trouble your daughter, and now I'll try my hand on you." At that I elevated my club and mauled her out of her slippers—I smelt whiskey about.

In the same neighborhood, just about day brake, I nabbed a young lark in the bushes making tracks for home at a rapid rate, and demanding an explanation he said he had been to Milton courting but that the girl's mother wouldn't let him stay all night and that he started home and getting as far as the "Ocean House"<sup>9</sup> he laid down on the platform and slept until 3 o'clock, & that he wanted to get before the old folks waked up home as they didn't know he went out. I was about to slather him but he begged off.

I caught one of those animals called wife-whippers in the act of chastising his poor wife—he had smashed the dishes, turned over the table, run all the children in the woods and threatened to kill somebody, but collaring the brute I tamed him down, and I'll be bound, Editor, he never strikes another woman. Women were not created to be whipped by men like dogs, and he who strikes his wife is a cowardly dog. One tap of my club split him from chin to shin.

A young love-stricken lark carrying an owl-shaped head in a certain village was mauled the other side of Jordan for fooling a young lady he was flying around by engaging to take her the next day (Sunday) to church in the country and then failed to put in an appearance. The lady got up early in the morning and dressed herself for the trip, but the young lark came not, and for fooling her I lifted him out of his boots.

But I must shoulder my club and hie-on for more game. Give my respects to all my agents and tell them to report to me promptly.

Yours foolishly,  
Jesse Holmes, the Fool Killer.

[The *Torch-Light* (Oxford, N.C.), 11 September 1877.]

\* \* \*

## LETTER FROM JESSE HOLMES, JR. THE FOOL SLAYER

Roadside, Near Oxford.

Editor: The dew-drops sparkle upon the tiny blades of grass, like so many jems, as I sit upon the fence and meditate. I am almost bewildered as I contemplate the situation. I hardly know where to begin first. Many a day has rolled off into oblivion since the "Fool Killer" passed around this way. He has his hands full. Editor, I propose to tap some of the fools gently and bring them to their senses.

I was in your village, Oxford, some time ago and saw a defeated aspirant for Clerk Superior Court crying like a fretful baby. I inquired the cause. Said he had failed to get the nomi-



nation. I lectured him upon the uncertainties of politics and brushed the tears from his face with my maul.

A certain benedict,<sup>10</sup> near Oxford, went home the other night with a red nose and told his wife it was sunburnt from looking through a piece of smoked glass at the eclipse. It was not a "smoked" glass he looked through, and the sun didn't make his nose red, either. I swung my maul around and fetched him a blow on his proboscis and I turned it blue.

Passing through a North Carolina inland village, I dropped into a printing shop, and I saw a young lad fingering the type. He wanted to know if they were not made out of loadstone, "to make them stick together." I tapped the white fuzz from his top lip and he went home a wiser man.

Yours foolishly,  
Jesse Holmes, Jr., Son of the old man.

[*Torch-Light*, 13 August 1878]

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1 The Fifteenth Amendment forbade the denial of voting-rights on the basis of race, color or previous condition of servitude.

2 I was not able to identify this tune.

3 Probably Robert W. Graves, aged about 60-65, son of General Barzillai Graves.

4 In 1884, Oliver was a dealer in liquors in Yanceyville.

5 I have not been able to identify Charles Butt.

6 A severe blow, usually to the head. See Durward T. Stokes, ed., "Five Letters from Jesse Holmes, the Fool Killer to the Editor of the *Milton Chronicle*," *North Carolina Historical Review*, Summer 1973, 50:304-21.

7 Evidently in Holloway township, northeastern Person County.

8 Probably in the Cunningham's Store vicinity of Caswell County.

9 Apparently a local hotel.

10 A "confirmed" bachelor who finally marries.



**BLACKBEARD: THE FIERCEST PIRATE OF ALL** by Norman C. Pendered (\$2.95, 80 pages, Times Printing Company, Manteo, N.C.) is the most recently published account of North Carolina's meanest and most fascinating folk "hero" (villain?). While this book hardly adds to what is known about Blackbeard, it is a succinct biography that reads rapidly (no footnotes) and will be valued by school libraries and members of the Blackbeard cult, of which we like to think of ourselves as Honorary President.





## FOLKTALES FROM THE INSTITUTE AT DUKE

by Mac E. Barrick

The sixth Southeastern Institute of Medieval and Renaissance Studies held at Duke University during July and August, 1974, brought together some fifty scholars from all over the United States. The session was one of feverish scholarly activity and a source of intellectual stimulation to most participants, but throughout the six-week period, an undercurrent of activity of a different intellectual level could be noted by anyone acquainted with the nature and form of folklore. At various formal and informal gatherings of the Fellows, occasional folk narratives drawn from oral tradition were recited, proving that folklore never completely disappears, even in the most sophisticated cultures.

For example, the public lectures presented by the Senior Fellows frequently contained illustrative anecdotes, either as part of the subject matter or as rhetorical devices. Siegfried Wenzel, lecturing on "Vices, Virtues, and Popular Preaching" on July 25, discussed a medieval Latin *ars praedicandi* titled *Fasciculus morum* in which there appeared a story of a horse being given religious funeral rites because its owner claimed the horse had left money to the priest in its will. The story has had wide circulation in folk literature, as evinced by the bibliography provided for it in the motif and tale-type indexes. Variants of it still appear frequently in joke collections.<sup>1</sup> During another such lecture on August 8, Giles Dawson, former Curator

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‡ An associate professor of Spanish at Shippensburg State College, Shippensburg, Pa., the author, with a doctorate from the University of Pa., collects folklore in his native Pennsylvania and has published in *Keystone Folklore Quarterly* and *JAF*. "Duke has a very impressive campus," he writes, "and an equally impressive library. I wish I could spend years there instead of those brief, fond weeks last summer."



of Books and Manuscripts at the Folger Shakespeare Library, speaking on "Problems of Editing Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century Letters," began with an anecdote commenting on the difficulty of reading handwriting as opposed to printing: "There was a countryman who had difficulty reading a letter. . . . He said, 'I can read readin' but I can't read writin'.'" <sup>2</sup>

Another type of folk narration, coming at informal meetings of the Fellows in the dining hall or during coffee hours or other such gatherings, consisted of personal memorates, which, though they cannot be considered folktales in any accepted sense, nonetheless have the general structure of folk legends and circulate orally. The following story told by a Fellow from the Southeast is a good example of this type:

My daddy grew up in southern New Mexico, and there was this one boy named Finus. He was the eighth of eight. The kids carried their lunch to school, and one day Finus pulled his out of the bag, and he had these two slices of bread, and he had a fried goose egg slapped between two slices of bread. Finus Henderson looks at it an' says, "It shore looks good . . . but not good enough to eat."

The naming of the protagonist is reminiscent of other stories about parents of large families naming the last child Quits, but the story is told as an actual event. Still, in the nature of all folk legend, it is a story related not directly by a participant in the action but by someone who has heard it at second hand. Other such memorates told at the Institute included a grotesque story of a guest who accidentally sits on his hostess' lap dog and kills it,<sup>3</sup> and a practical joke in which a girl babysitting for a friend convinces her boyfriend that the baby is his illegitimate child and tells him the truth only after he offers to marry her.<sup>4</sup>

Other stories told at these informal gatherings were usually variants of traditional folktales with extensive histories. One of them blends elements of a numskull tale with a more recent ethnic joke:

There was an archeological meeting in Rome, and the Italians got up and said that the ancient Romans must have had telephones because they dug down and found telephone poles in the ruins. Then the Iranians got up and said that they had dug down and discovered copper wires, so they must have had the telegraph. Then the Israelis got up and said that they had dug and no matter how deep they dug, they had found no trace of wires, so the ancient Jews must have had the wireless.<sup>5</sup>



Another story told by Professor Dawson has had an extensive circulation in the popular media, being told frequently on radio and television in the 1960s and appearing in occasional anthologies of jokes since then:<sup>6</sup>

A group of people were on a flight from New York to London. After they were in the air, a voice came over the loudspeaker, "Ladies and gentlemen, this is a historic occasion. You are on the first completely automatic flight. The pilot is automatic, the copilot is automatic, and the navigator is automatic. Please sit back and relax, because nothing can ever go wrong, ever go wrong, ever go wrong. . . ."

The following yarn, previously uncollected, has many of the characteristics of a Shaggy Dog story, though Jan Harold Brunvand, who has catalogued many such stories, does not list it:<sup>7</sup>

An Oriental teacher was instructing his students, and they asked him what held up the earth. He said, "The earth is on the back of an elephant who is standing on the back of another elephant." Of course, no one dared question him about it, but finally some years later one of the students got up the nerve to ask, "What is the second elephant standing on?" And he said, "There are elephants all the way down."

One is reminded of the ornamental figures of elephants stacked one upon the other which are often sold in souvenir and gift shops.

At a luncheon (August 7), the wife of a Professor of German from southern Pennsylvania was reminded of a story she had heard recently:

These people had just come back from a trip, and there was a package or something came to the door and they didn't have the money to pay for it. The woman said, "I don't have any money," and the little boy said, "I do." And he started counting out all this change. Afterward they asked him where he got all that money, and he said, "Well, you know how careless Dad is with money. He leaves it on the table in restaurants. I just picked it up."

Though the story has all the earmarks of being a true one, it is nonetheless traditional, and has again been collected several times in jokebooks.<sup>8</sup>

As the summer of 1974 was a historic one, the political situation was a natural subject of conversation. One story that kept popping up involved President Nixon:



Nixon was walking around Washington, going to all the monuments to see if he could find a way out of his problems, so he went up to the statue of Washington and said, "What should I do?" And Washington said, "Always tell the truth." And he said, "That's a good idea." Then he went to the statue of Jefferson and said, "What should I do?" And Jefferson said, "Make a declaration." And he thought, "That's good." So then he went to the statue of Lincoln and said, "What should I do?" And Lincoln said, "Go to the theater."<sup>9</sup>

Though obviously not a very old example of folk narrative, the story was in oral circulation among several groups of people who had no direct contact with each other. Similar examples of political lore, such as the chain letter about the President's statue or a parody on the twenty-third Psalm, are regularly updated every four years either as scurrilous political propaganda or simply as clever statements on the then-current candidates.<sup>10</sup> This story of Nixon will undoubtedly surface again in 1976 with a different protagonist asking the same questions.

The day after Nixon's resignation, the North Carolina newspapers used banner headlines covering half the front page, leading one of the Institute Fellows from Pennsylvania to recall the following anecdote:

A small-town newspaper editor was away from the office when something happened in town. His assistant promptly went to press with a headline using the paper's largest type. When the editor returned, he was very upset. He said, "Didn't you know that I was saving that type for the Second Coming of Christ?"<sup>11</sup>

The subsequent swearing-in of the new President was also the subject of updated political wisecracks. For example, one Fellow remarked that "Gerald Ford wanted to donate his papers to the National Archives, but they wouldn't take them. They don't take coloring books." The coloring-books joke has also been told about such varied political figures as George Wallace, Orval Faubus, and former Governor Don Samuelson of Idaho.<sup>12</sup>

The fact that these narratives deal with politics, oriental philosophies, and scientific discoveries might suggest that they are not folkloric, since the folk do not generally discuss these matters. Still the nature of their circulation and the traditional parallels that have been adduced for a number of them indicate that they are true folklore. The folklore of the twentieth century does indeed differ from that of earlier times: airplanes and automobiles are to this generation what horses and



oxcarts were to an earlier one, and more extensive education and the advent of television have made everyday conversation of material unknown at an earlier folk level. Then, too, the matter of the definition of "folk" must be considered, for it is a more generally inclusive term than has been recognized heretofore. "While most attempts to characterize the sources of folklore have emphasized isolation, lack of sophistication, and groups with relative homogeneity, judging from the materials that folklorists collect and study, such qualities are certainly not essential to fostering folklore. On the contrary, folklore flourishes among some of the most sophisticated and mobile Americans—teen-agers, entertainers, athletes, professors, and members of the armed forces."<sup>13</sup> Especially among students and professors is there a great deal of esoteric folklore, as indicated by the frequent appearance of erotic lore in the form of the so-called "dirty joke." It was in private joking sessions in the dormitories during late-night bull sessions that this, the most significant type of folk narrative currently extant, was told. In these sessions, the participants, Ph.D.'s all, and several of them senior professors, reveled in this very ancient type of folktale, which because of its nature is one of the few examples of truly traditional folk literature still surviving in oral culture. Of the examples of this type of folktale collected, many are purely traditional, with variants of them occurring elsewhere in the country. Most of them have frequently collected parallels:

A Negro preacher was preaching a sermon and a white girl came running down the aisle with no clothes on, threw herself on the floor and started rolling around. The preacher said, "Don't anybody look! You'll go blind." And a little boy down front says, "I think I'm gonna risk one eye."<sup>14</sup>

Queen Elizabeth went to Australia, and among the people she met was a photographer. And she said, "You know, I have a brother-in-law who's a photographer." And he said, "That's a coincidence. I have a brother-in-law who's a queen."<sup>15</sup>

A young boy was cast up on a desert island for eighteen years with nothing to eat but wild berries, fish and clams. Finally a girl is shipwrecked there too, and she discovers that he knows nothing about sex. So she proceeds to show him. Afterwards, the boy is angry with her. He says, "You've ruined my clam digger."<sup>16</sup>

From this brief survey it is evident that a great deal of



folklore does exist in the oral culture of even the highest intellectual levels of American society, though it is generally unrecognized as such by its purveyors. Many academicians do indeed occupy an ivory tower at several removes from contact with or awareness of the culture of people outside their own close circle. College professors, except those teaching folklore, tend to be unaware of what their students talk about in private conversation. Only slowly does the humor of the folk filter up to their lofty level and then it too often arrives through a semiliterary medium. One Fellow from Yale recited the common Polack riddle joke, "How many Polacks does it take to change a lightbulb?" "Three. One to hold the bulb and two to turn the ladder." Yet he was amazed to discover the great number of such jokes that exist and seemed incredulous when told that they had been collected and studied by folklorists.<sup>17</sup>

## NOTES

1 See Aarne-Thompson, type 1842; Thompson, motif J1607; D. P. Rotunda, *Motif-Index of the Italian Novella* (Bloomington, 1942), J1607; Frederic C. Tubach, *Index Exemplorum* (Helsinki, 1969), no. 376. Cf. Kurt Ranke, ed., *European Anecdotes and Jests* (Copenhagen, 1972), no. 193 and note (p. 184). See also Clyde Murdock, *A Treasury of Humor* (Grand Rapids, Mich., 1967), 39-40 (no. 121); Isaac Asimov, *Treasury of Humor* (Boston, 1971), 336-337 (no. 499); *Jewish Jokes for the John* (Pocket Book ed., 1972), 78.

2 Cf. Thompson, motif J2258 *Boy cannot read a book written with smaller letters than those he was reading in school*.

3 Told by a Professor of English from Rochester, N.Y., July 23, 1974. Cf. similar stories of a drunk mistakenly squeezing a canary, thinking it a lemon (Larry Wilde, *The Official Irish Joke Book* [New York, 1974], 63) or a rug-layer flattening a cat left under the rug, mistaking it for a pack of cigarettes (Bennett Cerf, *The Sound of Laughter* [Bantam ed., 1972], 17).

4 Told by a Professor of Spanish from Los Angeles, July 23, 1974.

5 Narrator not identified, August 5, 1974.

6 E.g., Murdock, *A Treasury of Humor*, no. 3; *More Playboy's Party Jokes* (Chicago, 1965); Bob Phillips, *The World's Greatest Collection of Clean Jokes* (Santa Ana, Cal., 1974), 4.

7 "A Classification for Shaggy Dog Stories," *Journal of American Folklore*, 76 (1963), 42-68. This version was told by a Professor of Spanish from Missouri.

8 E.g., Bill Adler, *Speaker's Complete Library of Wit and Humor* (West Nyack, N.Y. 1970), 91-92.

9 Told by a Professor from Los Angeles, July 16, 1974. A shorter version was being told in the halls of the Duke Divinity School on July 31 by a local faculty member.



10 See Alan Dundes, "The President's Statue and the Promised Land," *Journal of the Midcontinent American Studies Association*, 4 (1963), 52-55; Ed Gray, "The Quadrennial Perennials," *Western Folklore*, 23 (1964), 199-201; Gary Alan Fine, "In Search of the Quadrennial Perennials," *Folklore Forum*, 7 (1974), 203-205, with a McGovern version of the Twenty-Third Psalm; and Michael J. Preston, "Xerox-Lore," *Keystone Folklore*, 19 (1974), 11-26, with Nixon versions of the Psalm and the "President's Statue."

11 See Edmund Fuller, *2500 Anecdotes for All Occasions* (New York, 1943), no. 1246; Barrick, "Pulpit Humor in Central Pennsylvania," *Pennsylvania Folklife*, 19, no. 1 (Autumn, 1969), 35.

12 See Louie W. Attebery, "Governor Jokes," *Southern Folklore Quarterly*, 33 (1969), 350-351.

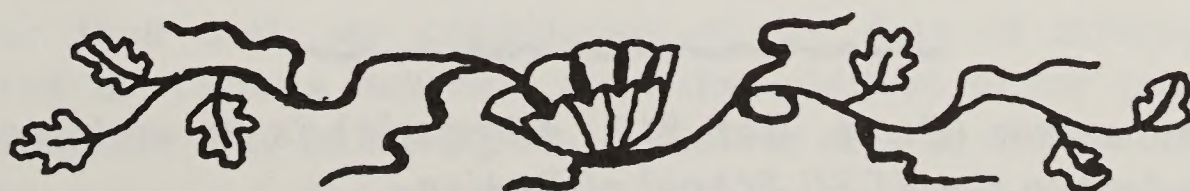
13 Jan Harold Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* (New York, 1968), 20.

14 Told by a Professor from Missouri (August, 1974), who heard it from a Las Vegas nightclub comedian. The story has also been collected in Arkansas and Pennsylvania; see Vance Randolph, *Hot Springs and Hell* (Hatboro, Pa., 1965), 41; Barrick, "The Folklore Repertory of a Pennsylvania Auctioneer," *Keystone Folklore*, 19 (1974), 37-38.

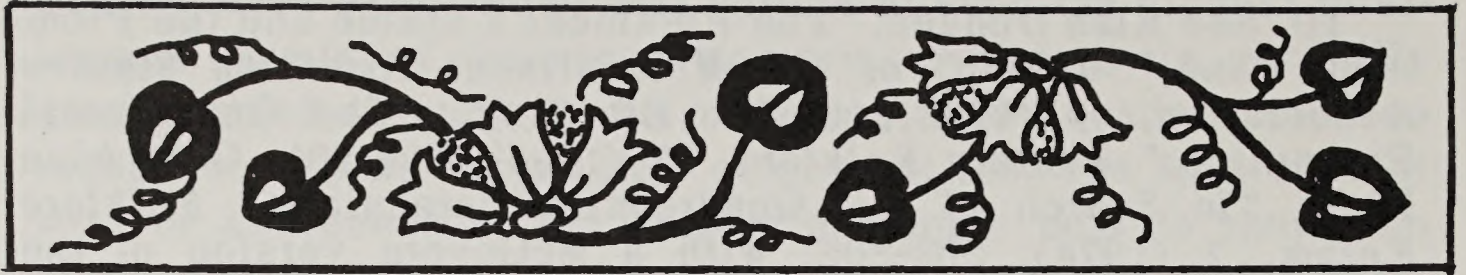
15 Told July 16, 1974. The story also appears in Angelo D'Arcangelo, *Gay Humor Book* (New York, 1972), 82.

16 Told by a Professor from Missouri, August, 1974. The story involves two motifs listed by Thompson, J1744 *Ignorance of sexual intercourse* and K1363 *Seduction of person ignorant of sexual intercourse*. For a discussion of the story and its psychological implications, see Gershon Legman, *Rationale of the Dirty Joke* (New York, 1968), 98-99. The story also appears in *The World's Dirtiest Jokes*, ed. Victor Dodson (Los Angeles, 1969), 41.

17 See Donald Simmons, "Anti-Italian-American Riddles in New England," *Journal of American Folklore*, 79 (1966), 478; William M. Clements, *The Types of the Polack Joke* (Bloomington, Ind., 1969), no. E7.6.6 (with 28 examples from the Indiana University archives); Barrick, "Racial Riddles and the Polack Jokes," *Keystone Folklore Quarterly*, 15 (1970), 8. Cf. the following jokebooks: Ed Zewbskewiecz, et al., *It's Fun to Be a Polak!* (Glendale, Cal., 1965), 29; Larry Wilde, *The Official Polish Joke Book* (New York, 1973), 32; Mike Kowalski, *The Polish Joke Book* (New York, 1974), front cover; Bob Phillips, *World's Greatest Collection of Clean Jokes*, 166. A similar joke is told in Germany about the number of East Frisians needed to milk a cow; see Onno Freese, pseud., *Ostfriesen Witze* (Wiesbaden, 1971), 32.







## THE TRAGIC BALLAD OF MISS EMMA HARTSELL

by Jan A. Herlocker

On winter nights Mama used to rock and sing, rock and sing about little Emma Hartsell, and we'd all be too scared to go to bed. Just think—those big old men after her—I'd cry and cry about poor Emma, a little girl no older than me, and she was *murdered!*—Mary Gaddy Herlocker, Rt. 3, Albemarle.

It wasn't until my neighbor Barrett Almond (Rt. 4, Albemarle) recently told me the story that I learned of the sad tale of poor little Emma Hartsell. It didn't take long to discover that the story is really a familiar one around Stanly and Cabarrus counties. It all took place out in the country near Concord back in 1898. There's even a ballad recounting the story of the murder and the hanging that quickly followed—the only hanging, it is said, to take place in Cabarrus County history. With only a little prodding from his wife, Mr. Almond related the story to me, assuring me first that it was only hearsay and probably not exactly right.

The Hartsell family lived on a farm not far from Concord. They were a churchgoing family, so when Sunday came around, they all dressed and went to church. Back in those days, Sunday church was an all-day affair, and it wasn't unusual for the services to last on over into the afternoon. Well, this particular Sunday, one of the children—there were probably four or five children in the family—a younger one was sick, so an older girl—this was Emma—had to stay at home and nurse it. Well, they all went off to church and left this young girl with the sick baby. For some reason—I think it started raining or something—the family all came back earlier than they had expected,

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‡ The author (Rt. 4, Box 210, Albemarle) is an architecture student in the NCSU School of Design.



rather than spending the whole day. Well, as they were coming up in the buggy, they saw the baby out beside the road under an apple tree. They knew something was wrong, because Emma wouldn't have left the baby outside by itself, especially in the wet after a rain. So when they went to the house, they found her body where she had been stabbed with a knife; the song says 'her throat was cut from ear to ear.' They may have raped her, too. Anyway there was no way to track whoever had done it because the rain had washed away the tracks. The father, of course, roused the neighbors up, and soon the news was spread everywhere. Well, the men all got together somewhere, and they were all trying to decide what to do, when somebody saw a Negro man who had blood on him. He grabbed him right off and got him to confess. I don't know if he was Tom or Joe—their names were Tom and Joe—anyway, whichever one he was, he told on the other one. The sheriff showed up sometime in all this, and he took them to the jail in Concord. The men were still all excited, and they kept hanging around Concord instead of going home. After a couple of hours they were all so upset they ended up back at the jail and commenced to try to break in to get the two Negro men. Well, they finally did, and they dragged them out to a place where there was a big old dogwood tree—it's a place on the way to Concord, where there's a fork in the road. Anyway, they hung them there; I think they fired their guns at them after that, too. And that was the only hanging that they ever had in Cabarrus County.

The story was straightforward enough. Rape, murder, revenge! I wondered if the facts were just that cut-and-dried, or if there were variations in the tale. My mother offered a clue as to whom I could contact to find out. "People say Frank Hartsell—he's a grown-up man now, of course—was the baby Emma was baby-sitting with that day." That was pretty impressive, practically an eye-witness account. So I paid a visit to Frank Hartsell (Rt. 4, Albemarle). At the very beginning Mr. Hartsell informed me that he was not the baby involved in the story, but he was from the same family; he was born in 1899, the year following the murder. But he agreed to tell me his version of the story as was told to him, and to supply some background information about his family.

His account and the information gathered from other informants and several printed sources were basically the same. Variations were found in a number of details, merely making each man's story his own. Although my narrative here is written rather than oral, my compilation of the bits of information offered by various sources, plus the addition of my point of view and my way of telling it, is another step in the process of "folklorization." The patchwork quilt I make from these scraps



of the story will be different from any other version.

Emma Hartsell was the daughter of Sam Hartsell and his first wife. He remarried after her death, and at the time of the murder they had several young children (Hartsell). The family lived about four miles from Concord as tenants on a farm belonging to Mr. C. W. Swink (*News and Observer*, Raleigh, May 31, 1898, p. 7). The house was near Coddle Creek on the old Concord-Charlotte highway. Frank Hartsell, who was, it seems, the seventh child of the family, was born in this house but grew up on a farm his father bought about a year after Emma's murder.

On the Sunday morning of the murder, the family went to a big revival meeting at Rocky Ridge Methodist Church rather than attending their regular church, the Poplar Tent Church. They expected to be gone most of the day, and one of the younger children was sick and fretting too much to carry off for an all-day affair. So Mrs. Hartsell decided to let Emma stay at home with the baby girl Elizabeth. Emma was a good girl, very easy to get along with, all sources agree, "She was twelve and loved life" (Randolph S. Hancock, *Daily Independent*, Kannapolis, Dec. 18, 1955), and she accepted her lot, keeping the baby cheerfully. There is a difference of opinion as to how ill the baby actually was. Perhaps there was a serious illness; it is implied that she was quite ill, and that Emma was busy with her when her parents left for church (Hancock), but another source implies that the baby was just fretful. Emma waved goodbye from the porch as her parents drove away, the last time they ever saw her alive (Hartsell).

No one knows exactly when or why the murder occurred. Emma was highly thought of and a beautiful girl; the only motive ever suggested was the "savage lust" in the murderers' hearts (Hancock). Maybe the men were waiting for Emma's parents to leave her alone on that morning, but that explanation seems invalid, since it could not have been predicted that she would be left home on that day. The men easily could have been familiar with the property, and have had robbery in mind. Since there was considerable racial trouble at the time throughout the state, there could conceivably have been some racial motive for the violent act (*Brown Collection*, 2:684). Emma's "outrage" and murder (*N & O*) occurred after her parents left for church. One source states that the murder took place between two and five o'clock (*N & O*). Others simply say that the family returned from church early because of rain or the threat of rain (Hancock). Some say they first saw the baby out



beside the road under an apple tree (Herlocker); others, that the baby was inside the house crying (Hancock).

The story goes that the men entered the house and Emma ran out another door, and that they chased her around the house several times, as witnessed by a neighbor, a Mr. Fink, from a distance, thinking they were only children playing (Hancock). The rape and murder took place in the house; however, one source specified the area as a corner in the dining room (Hancock) with blood spattered all over the room, while another insisted that Emma's body was discovered in the kitchen behind the stove (Hartsell). On this, all sources agree, possibly because of the line in the ballad that "her throat was cut from ear to ear," perhaps by a kitchen knife.

Of course the family immediately roused the neighbors, and the news apparently traveled very fast. There is no explanation as to how the neighbors organized themselves after assembling, but there may have been as many as two hundred men. The hunt was on, but nobody knew what to hunt for (Hancock). All that is known is that two men were suspected of committing the crime. A newspaper article published just after the events relates the story differently from any of the oral versions. Frank Pharr received the news of the tragedy from a young Negro, who was on his way to town to report it. Pharr suspected him, however, and held him until Sheriff Buchanan and his deputy arrived from Concord. This man, Joe Kiser, confessed to the crime and named another Negro, Tom Johnston, as his cohort, and both men were carried away (N & O).

The other version is that somehow among the crowds gathering, it was noticed by a Mr. Honeycutt that a certain Negro had blood on his clothes. It isn't known which of the two it was, but he was taken to jail in Concord where he informed on his partner, and the two were charged with the crime (Hancock). All sources except the early newspaper article name the second man Tom Johnson, not Johnston. Although it is agreed that both were young men, one printed source refers to Joe and Tom as being 24 and 20 years old, respectively (N & O); whereas another places their ages at 30 and 25 (Hancock).

At this point there began a severe case of "mob fever" (Hancock). Men from Concord and out in the country gathered, excited and angry. As night drew near, the sheriff tried to retain as much order as possible and even threatened to kill the first man to lay hands on the accused men (N & O), but as time passed, the crowd became more and more violent. E. J. Linker described the mob: "I reckon there were about three or four hun-



dred men in the crowd. And they were a bunch of mad men, too" (Hancock). A number of old Confederate soldiers set themselves up as a guard for the jail (Hartsell), but despite them and all the sheriff's efforts, the men could be held no longer.

By nine o'clock, they were uncontrollable. A large black man with yellow skin (Hancock), who was widely respected in the community (Hartsell), made the first move and broke down the jail door. The mob then rushed the jail, found the two men, dragged them out, and carried them several miles out of town to the "cut" on the Concord-Mt. Pleasant highway where there was a fork in the road. On the side of the road stood an unusually large dogwood tree, to which the two accused men were strung up. Whether the victims were calm (*N & O*) or whether they "did some screaming and hollering" (Hancock), nothing could stop the angry mob. A Presbyterian preacher, Rev. W. C. Alexander, tried to minister to the victims "spiritually" (*N & O*). It is unsure what, if any, final words the two men offered. Stories range from a plea that they were not guilty (*N & O*) to asking for a drink of water, the reply to this being that they could drink their water in hell soon enough (Hancock). After the men were hanged, their bodies were riddled with one hundred shots. That night the bodies were left suspended from the tree, but were presumably removed the next day by county officials (Hancock), possibly by a chain gang (Hartsell). No one knows where they were buried, or if their families tried to claim them.

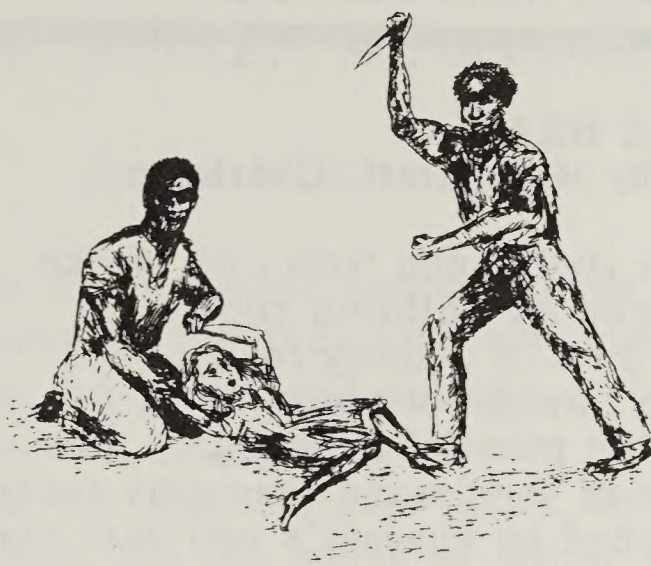
Emma Hartsell was buried in the Poplar Tent Church cemetery alongside her mother. The inscription on her tombstone tells her story:

Emma, daughter of  
S. J. and E. G. Hartsell,  
born Sept. 11, 1885, brutally  
murdered May 29, 1898. . .  
Henceforth, there is laid  
up for me a crown of  
righteousness.

Emma's story was not the kind soon forgotten in this peaceful area of Piedmont North Carolina, and the story was developed into a ballad. The *Brown Collection* (II, 684-87; Music, IV, 320) includes the ballad of Emma Hartsell with four variants. A fifth was offered by my aunt Mary Gaddy Herlocker (*Stanly News and Press*, Albemarle, February 17, 1956). I had this variant recopied as it might have appeared if printed on a broadside.



# THE BALLAD OF EMMA HARTSELL



In eighteen hundred ninety-eight  
Sweet Emma met with an awful fate.  
'Twas on the Holy Sabbath day,  
When her sweet life was snatched away.

It sets my brains all in a whirl,  
To think of that poor little girl  
Who rose that morning fair and bright,  
And before five a mangled sight.

It caused many a heart to bleed  
To think and hear of such a deed.  
Her friends they shed many a tear,  
Her throat was cut from ear to ear.

Just as the wind did cease to blow,  
They caught the men, 'twas Tom and Joe.  
The sheriff, he drove in such a dash  
The howling mob could scarcely pass.

They got to town by half-past seven,  
Their necks were broken before eleven.  
The people there were a sight to see,  
They hung them to a dogwood tree.

Fathers and mothers warning take,  
Never leave your daughters for God's sake,  
But take them with you wherever you go,  
And always think of Tom and Joe.

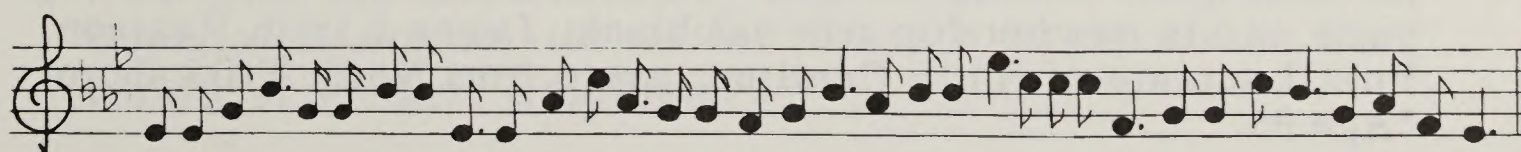
Kind friends, we must all bear in mind,  
They caught the men that did the crime.  
There's not a doubt around the alert,  
Tom said he held while Joe did the work.

Sweet Emma's gone to a world of love,  
Where Tom and Joe dare not to go.  
We think they have gone to a world below  
For treating little Emma so.

Kind friends we must all remember this,  
That Emma will be sadly missed.  
And one thing more that I do know,  
This world is rid of Tom and Joe.

As they stood on death's cold brink  
Joe Kiser begged the men for drink.  
"No drink! No drink!" the men replied,  
"To hell, to hell your soul must fly."

One thing more my song does lack,  
I forgot to say the men were black.  
Her friends and neighbors said the same.  
And Emma Hartsell was her name.





Frank Hartsell remembered that his father never did like the song, or like having people sing about poor Emma. People don't like to be reminded of sadness, but for some reason the tragic incident has never completely been forgotten. The ballad and the story of Emma Hartsell remain alive today in Cabarrus and Stanly counties in North Carolina.

---

## HOME HEAT

by Mary Kratt, Charlotte

Their lives spun from city smoke  
 how can my children know  
 heat dust of country roads,  
 white threads of paths  
 winding parallel between  
 walls of weeds and long gray fences  
 bleached by summer's constant sun.

The wood of fence and tree  
 like country people  
 bear age proudly.  
 Bark ripples with cracks,  
 boards run with ridges  
 worried there by time and weather.

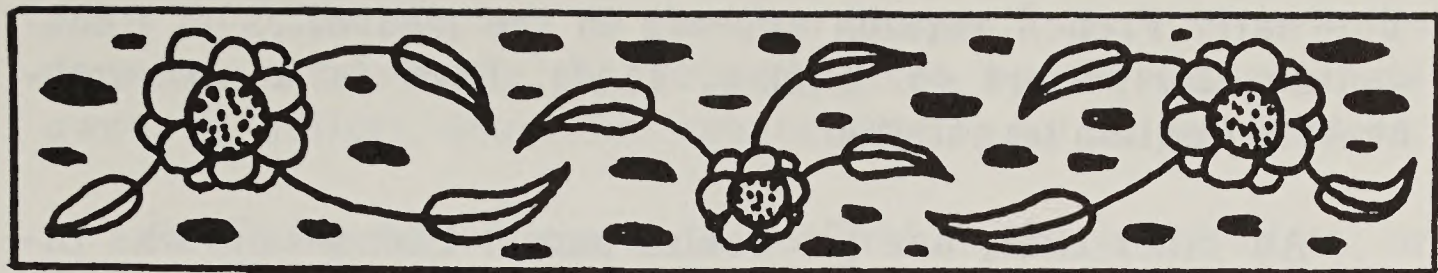
No people happen here,  
 only a lizard spurts across  
 startled from his sleep.  
 His eye to my eye, we watch.  
 He could be painted on that post.  
 Flies bite my ankle, I move,  
 my lizard darts away alive again.

Heat surges from  
 dry jigsaw puzzled cracks of clay,  
 grips me in its loving vise,  
 curls round me—  
 in the city I would wither—  
 then wraps me in the old, authentic envelope  
 of sun and summer in this place.

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**COMMENTS FROM OUR READERS.** "We wouldn't be without the NCFJ. It is excellent!"—Frank Warner, Old Brookville, N.Y. "I am a teacher. My students have enjoyed the issues of the *Journal*"—William A. McSwain, Kings Mountain. "I do enjoy this publication!"—Mrs. John Robert Lane, Mt. Olive. "Thanks for some good reading"—Glenn Tucker, Fairview. And under his name on his membership renewal blank, James Larkin Pearson, Poet Laureate of North Carolina, wrote from North Wilkesboro, "Age 95."





## THE IMITATING MONKEY: A FOLKTALE MOTIF IN POE

by Charles Clay Doyle

Monkeys are funny. Since ancient times people have discovered amusement in the fact that simians, though they so accurately mimic the poses and actions of human beings, yet do not *quite* succeed. Edgar Allan Poe's famous mystery tale "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" must be called grotesque rather than comical; yet the sense of horror which readers experience at the conclusion results in part from the discovery that the fiendish murderer is one whom we would ordinarily expect to laugh at: an orangutang. The grotesque juxtaposition of humor and horror becomes even more marked when we view the ending of the story in light of an old and widely distributed folktale incident.

The tale survives in the prose of a sixteenth-century French scholar and reappears in the oral lore of the American South. Here is a modern version:

. . . That's how Mr. Jones found out the monkey was tricking him. Well, he didn't want to give him away and he didn't want to sell him; so when he got home he studied up a scheme to get rid of him. He gets some soap and his bresh and lathers his face good. Then he shaves the lather off. Next he takes the razor and jerks the back of it across his throat quick. Then he lays it down and walks out. So the monkey he had slipped in there and watched him, and as soon as Mr. Jones walks out he lathers. Well, it only takes him two or three strokes to get the suds off his face. So he takes the razor then, but he didn't turn it over like his master had; he tuck the blade and jerked it across his throat and committed suicide. So his master got rid of him without selling or killing him or giving him away. He tricked the monkey for trying to impitate him.<sup>1</sup>

---

‡ Now with the Department of English at the University of Georgia at Athens, the author formerly taught at the University of Southern California.



The early French version appears in the *Nouvelles* of Bonaventure Desperiers (c. 1500-c. 1544). Here is a sixteenth-century English translation:

An other time, hee [a cobbler named Blondeau] was offended with a Gentleman, that dwelled right over against his shop, who had an Ape, that did a thousand shreud turnes to Blondeaw. For he beeing in a window watched the Cobbler when hee cut out peeces of lether for his shooes, and behelde how he did, and so soone as poore Blondeaw was gone to Dinner, or to any other place about his businesse, the same Ape would come downe to goe into the Cobblers shop, and take his cutting knife, & cut out the leather, as he had seen Blondeaw doe, & this was his custom and use at all times that Blondeaw was gone out: so that the poore man was faine to eat & drinke a great while in his shop, and durst not go abroad unles he had locked up his lether: and if he had forgotten at any time to shut it up, then the Ape would not forget to cut out peeces. Which thing did trouble him very much, and also he durst doo no harme to the Ape, for feare of his master. When he was so weary of this displeasure, that he could forbear no longer, he thought he would be revenged, & perceiving it was the Apes property to counterfeyt him in all thinges: (for if Blondeaw had whette his knife, so would this Ape doe, yf he had thrust with his naule, this Ape would do so after him, and if that he had pulled out his threedes at length, the Ape would pull out, as he had seene him doe) upon a time he did whet his cutting knife, and made it as sharpe as a razour, and at that time when he espied the Ape to looke earnestly uppon him, he began to put his cutting knife against his throate, and to goe with it to and fro, as though he would have cut his owne throate: and when he had done this twise or thrise, that the Ape mighte learne it, hee laide downe his knife, and shut his shop doore, and wente home to Dinner. This Ape by and by commeth downe, and entreth his shoppe, thinking to trie this new game and pastime, that he had never seene before: And hee taketh up the paring knife, and straightwayes put it to his throate, going with it to and fro, as he had seene Blondeaw the Cobbler doe: but he put it too neare his throate, and taking no regarde, cut his owne throat, whereof he died within an houre after. And thus Blondeaw was revenged of the Ape, without any daunger of his Mayster.<sup>2</sup>

Curiously, no record of the tale exists between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries. Whether it has been reinvented or circuitously transmitted through the ages and across the cultures is impossible to determine. Quite unknowable, too, is whether Poe was familiar with the tale, either in its printed form or in some oral state.

The fact remains that the motif (significantly altered) ap-



pears in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue." Here is how the narrator, summarizing the account given by the orangutang's owner (a sailor), describes events leading up to the murders:

Returning home from some sailors' frolic on the night, or rather in the morning of the murder, he found the beast occupying his own bed-room, into which it had broken from a closet adjoining, where it had been, as was thought, securely confined. Razor in hand, and fully lathered, it was sitting before a looking-glass, attempting the operation of shaving, in which it had no doubt previously watched its master through the key-hole of the closet.<sup>3</sup>

What turns this basically comic situation (as in the folktale) into an occurrence of horror is that the imitating ape, rather than slitting its own throat, disastrously "shaves" an unfortunate woman. Escaping from its master, it enters an open upstairs window. There "the gigantic animal had seized Madame L'Espanaye by the hair, (which was loose, as she had been combing it,) and was flourishing the razor about her face, in imitation of the motions of a barber." Here the foolish imitation of shaving results in murder instead of suicide. The folktale takes a grim change of direction, which adds a further dimension of surprise and horror to the outcome of Poe's story.

## NOTES

1 Printed in Richard Dorson, collector, *American Negro Folktales* (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett paperback, 1967), 350. Dorson (p. 349) designates the incident as Motif K585, *Fatal game: Shaving necks. Dupe's head cut off*; the correct number for that motif is K858. Actually, the more proper classification would be Motif J2413.4.3, *Foolish imitation by an animal: Monkey cuts his throat*. Another version of the tale is printed in B.A. Botkin, ed., *Lay My Burden Down: A Folk History of Slavery* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1945), 23. The tale seems to be widely known among both black people and white people throughout the South (coastal, highland, and midland). The present writer has encountered it both in East Texas (where he grew up) and in North Georgia (where he now lives).

2 The translation is by one T.D., *The Mirrour of Mirth, and pleasant Conceits* (London: Roger Warde, 1583), leaves 22<sup>v</sup>-23<sup>r</sup>. The original French may be found in Desperiers, *OEuvres Françaises*, ed. Louis Lacour (Paris: P. Jannet, 1856), II, 92-3.

3 *Selected Tales*, introd. Kenneth Graham (London: Oxford University Press, 1967), 196. The quotation following is from p. 197.



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# GATEWAY TO NORTH CAROLINA *Folklore*

Leonidas Betts and Richard Walser

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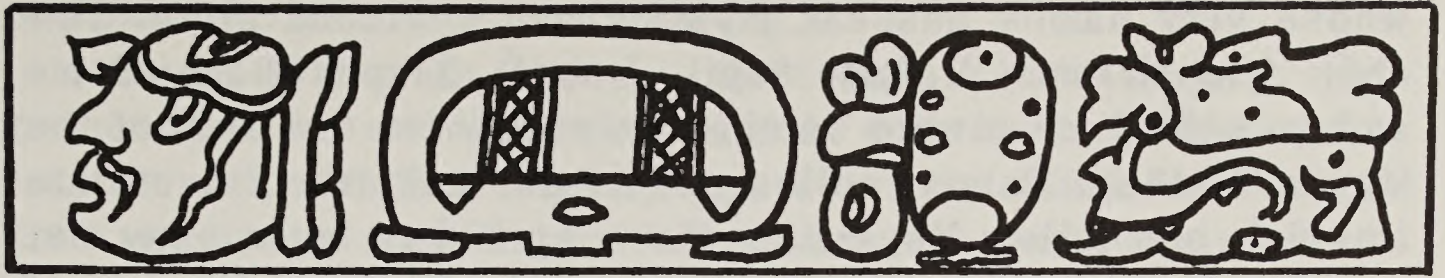
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GATEWAY TO NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE is a 24-page publication designed as an introduction to the study of folklore for North Carolina students. Prepared by Leonidas Betts, editor of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* and associate professor of English and Education at North Carolina State University, and by Richard Walser, former editor of *NCFJ* and professor emeritus of English at State, GATEWAY presents a broad if limited selection of folkloric materials and should be a valuable aid for teachers who desire to present a unit in North Carolina folklore. It is not a text, but rather a starting point—to be read, studied, and discussed. Afterwards, students can begin individual projects, leading to the development of skills in reading, collecting, listening, speaking, and writing.

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## FOLKLORE AND TRAVEL IN MEXICO AND GUATEMALA

by Leonidas Betts

The yellow light of the tropical sunset illuminated only the upper level of Temple I, juxtaposed against the deepening green shadows in the Great Plaza. My traveling companion and I sat on the stairs leading down to the ceremonial courtyard, lined with its monumental stelae that preserve in hieroglyphics the dates and events whose significance shall perhaps forever elude us. The softly staccato voice of Mario, our Maya guide, was confused with the raucous cries of the flocks of parrots petulantly roosting amid the ruins.

We had come to Tikal, the immense remote city in the Petén jungle lowlands of northern Guatemala, in spite of two recent plane crashes there, one at Christmas and one on the day of our arrival at Guatemala City. These disasters seemed to make our visit the foolhardiest of ventures. Yet with Calvinist resolve we had flown in a small plane to Flores, a tiny island town in Lago El Petén, the site of the last Maya citadel, which fell finally to the Spanish conquerors in 1697. We had landed on a rough dirt airstrip beside a chicle warehouse and then had motored the fifty rutted dirt-road miles to Tikal with a driver innocent of English.

Tikal was the climax of a near-mystic pilgrimage, beginning in the chrome and glass of modern Mexico City, leading to the Tabasco town of Villahermosa and the ruins of Palenque in Chiapas; to the quietly modern zones of Guatemala City, within its city limits the oldest known Maya ruin, Kaminaljuyú; to Antigua Guatemala, earthquake-ravaged capital; to tiny Panajachel and volcano-rimmed Lake Atitlán; to anachronistic Chichecastenario; and then to Flores and Tikal.

My official leave from teaching duties in the English Department at NCSU afforded me the time to complete, in part, a circuit begun in 1970, when I had visited the archaeological zones in Yucatan. The memories of the ceremonial centers



whose very names bespeak mystery and moribund glory—Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, Kabáh, Sayil, Labná, Xlapak—haunted me and propelled me toward another expedition to the land of the Mayas. Richard Walser, colleague, friend, folklorist, inveterate traveler, and fellow Maya-enthusiast, agreed to accompany me.

Our first stop was Mexico City and the National Museum of Anthropology, deservedly ranked among the finest museums in the world, and probably the loveliest. There we could study firsthand the choicest treasures of Mesoamerican civilizations, particularly the incomparable Maya collection.

Sheer serendipity found us at the Basilica of the Virgin of Guadalupe, shrine of the patron saint of Mexico, Ash Wednesday. The wide plaza before the basilica was crowded with pilgrims and performing groups from all over Central America. Dancing troupes took turns before entering the dim, humanity-packed edifice. Most spectacular were the Vera Cruz dancers, dressed in bizarre costumes suggesting Spanish conquistadores wielding swords, capering and cavorting in mock ferocity. Here was one of the first evidences of the blending of ancient paganism, the Spanish influence, and the accretions of the twentieth century.

Flying to Villahermosa, our plane passed between the spectacular peaks of Popocateptl and Ixtaccíhuatl, snow-capped volcanoes, in Aztec legend the figures of the princess Ixtal, a star-crossed suicide, and her commoner-lover, Popo.

Our primary purpose in visiting Villahermosa was to see the monumental Olmec heads in the outdoor La Venta Museum and to travel to Palenque, the Maya city, set gemlike in the hilly rainforest of Chiapas, its architecture and exuberant stucco decoration the most flamboyant examples of Maya art yet unearthed.

Through careful prearrangement we were in Villahermosa on a Sunday night to witness the *paseo* in the city square. The festivities began with a concert by the Tabasco Symphony Orchestra, which played, rather incongruously, "The Washington Post March." During the concert the *paseo* had already begun, with the young Tabascans, dressed in their finest clothes, circling the perimeter of the square in both directions, eyeing each other, pairing, and drifting away to their various trysts. By the time the Mexican-style rock-and-roll band began to play, the *paseo* was in high gear. From preteenagers to young adults, the participants strolled arm-in-arm or singly, in their traditional Sunday courtship ritual. This was a folk rite, beautiful and exciting, and we were delighted to realize that we were



the only two outsiders in the throng.

On to Guatemala City . . . Guatemala's population is fifty percent Indian, and even the capital, with its futuristic architecture and twentieth-century air, bears the indelible mark of its native populace. The central market, the *mercado*, is crowded with the agricultural produce and handicrafts of the Indians: exotic fruits and vegetables, meats, fish, tropical flowers, brightly hued fabrics, pottery, silver, leather. Although the *mercado* is housed in a modern building, the bustle of purchase and barter cannot be very different from that on market days centuries before. On a street corner near the Ritz Hotel, where we stayed, sat an Indian with a cardboard box full of lively little parrots for sale: I thought of the Maya aristocrat, with his pet parrot, frozen eternally in a carving at Palenque.

Going by minibus to Lake Atitlan, we passed through numbers of mountain villages, each characterized by its own peculiar native costume. The men of one village may wear kilts; of another, loose white trousers and blue shirts, trimmed in red embroidery. Surely no country can rival Guatemala in the variety and brilliance of its native dress. And everywhere the visitor can stop at weaving centers to observe the handsome, dark-skinned women toiling at their simple sling looms, weaving the exquisite patterns the world has come to admire: textured monochrome wools, embroidered and needlepointed fabrics, brocades.

Our hotel room at Panajachel jutted into the transparent blue water of Lake Atitlán, looking out to the volcanoes behind which the sun set in a misty red bank. In the early morning, as if on cue, our sleep was broken by the cries of Indian fishermen just under our balcony, pulling into their frail wooden boats their fishing nets studded with silvery perch, a scene surely enacted for centuries.

Midmorning found us at fabled Chichecastenario on market day. The gleaming white church perches on a small hill before the market area. When we arrived, the Quiche Maya rituals on the cascade of church steps had already begun. At no other sanctuary in the world do Christian services occur, to be followed by sanctioned pagan rites. The witch doctors stood or knelt at the church door, swinging their censer of burning copal, the precious resin so revered by the ancient Mayas. Inside the church the central aisle is set with small, low altars, where thin, white candles are lit and the offerings of rose petals and corn are laid. The witch doctors, after their elaborate purification exercises outside, entered to offer up to the old gods their



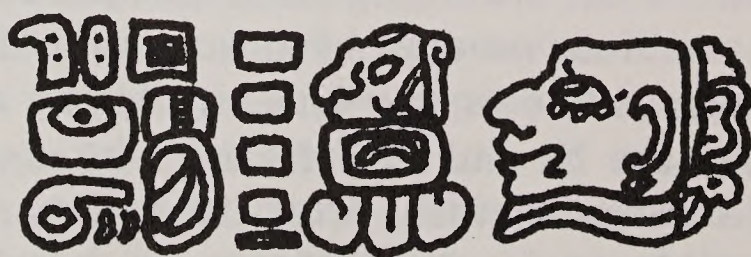
prayers and sacrifices. As the dark, acrid smoke of the burning copal rises to blacken the vaulted ceiling of the church, the observer cannot but be awed by this ultimate symbol of the durability of the old ways, this enduring remnant of a fallen civilization with its intense and compelling spiritual force.

The Maya civilization flourished in southern Mexico, Guatemala, and Honduras for nearly a thousand years, reaching its apogee about 300-600 A.D. After this Classic Period, signs of decadence and portents of destruction began to appear. By 1100 A.D. a precipitous, malignant decline had set in. The ceremonial centers, largely abandoned, had been relinquished to rank jungle growth. Only a barbaric, bloodthirsty Toltec-contaminated vestige of the old grace, dignity, moderation, and intellectualism remained. The laborers, once compelled by their time-obsessed masters to erect the splendid palaces, temples, and observatories, returned to the simple life of their thatched huts and *milpas*.

The Mayas live on. Especially in Yucatan the native hotel staffs of the Mayaland or the Hacienda Uxmal look as if they have momentarily stepped down from the delicately carved friezes of the decaying palaces. But they are a quiet, pliant, uneducated shadow of one of the greatest civilizations of the ancient world. Their ancestors discovered the concept of the zero before the Arabs; their calendar was more accurate than our own; they could calculate dates millions of years into the past and into the future; they built pyramids to rival Cheops.

Some of the old yet remains, transmogrified or diluted. Even today peasant architecture is identical to that of a thousand years ago. The gate at Labná preserves in its decorative detail the figures of peasant huts just as they still exist. But the intellectuals, the astronomer-priests, the aristocrats—all gone, destroyed inexplicably, perhaps cataclysmically. . . .

There was much to contemplate in the dying light at Tikal that February evening, as Richard and I sat looking at the crumbling remains of the splendid temples, half-listening to Mario's well-rehearsed lecture on the glory that was. Darkness gradually settled upon the face of Temple I, and the jungle seemed to close in on us as near as breath.









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<b>The Young Scotsman and the Beautiful Mermaid,</b> <i>Margaret McMahan . . . . .</i>	99
<b>Three Generations of Tag, Katie Jerome . . . . .</b>	101
<b>Nancy Loudermilk, The Witch, Shepherd M. Dugger . . . . .</b>	105
<b>"State" Jokes on the Carolina Campus, Sharon Costner . . .</b>	107
<b>Ghost Stories Told by Black People, Gilbert Cooley . . . . .</b>	113
<b>The Belled Buzzard, Harry C. West . . . . .</b>	118
<b>It's Raining Frogs!, Roger Beatty . . . . .</b>	121
<b>Folkways in Ovid Pierce's "The Wedding Guest",</b> <i>Douglas J. McMillan . . . . .</i>	125

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## From the Editor's Desk

**ANNUAL MEETING.** On Friday, November 7, at 2 p.m., the Folklore Society will hold its annual meeting in the Governor's Room at the Sheraton Crabtree Motor Inn (not as in former years at the downtown Hotel Sir Walter) in the Crabtree Shopping Center area off Highway 70 West on the outskirts of Raleigh. Presiding will be President Charles W. Joyner of Laurinburg. Maggie Lauterer of Forest City, whose disk *Winding River* is well known, will sing mountain ballads; Ruth Jewell and dancers from the Raleigh area will entertain with a brief survey of folk dance in North Carolina; Brian Medas, artist-in-residence at Wake Technical Institute, will present an illustrated history of the guitar. Our usual three-minute business meeting and the annual presentation of the Brown-Hudson Folklore Awards will round out the program. Before and after the meeting, members and visitors are urged to attend other events of Culture Week.

**STUDENT CONTEST.** Through the generosity of the North Carolina Arts Council, our *Journal* is sponsoring another student writing contest this coming year. Any graduate or undergraduate student enrolled in a North Carolina college or university at any time during spring and fall of 1975 and spring 1976 is eligible. Both "collecting" and "library" articles (typed, double-spaced, with notes within the text) may be submitted. See the February 1974 issue of *NCFJ* for model. Deadline for submission is May 1, 1976. First prize is \$100; second prize, \$50. The winning articles, along with others submitted, will be published in the *Journal*.

**MADSTONES.** On the rainy Sunday afternoon of last July 13, several dozen folks gathered at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph D. Clark in Raleigh to exhibit and talk about madstones. Owners in attendance with their stones were G. Alvis Allen of Creedmore, Edward Leon Madden of Saxapahaw, and the following from Raleigh: W. R. Buchanan, Mrs. Inez Wilson Dixon, T. C. Dixon, Mrs. Maynard Hester, L. Beecher Williams, and Mrs. Connie E. Wilson. Also present was Jack H. Wood, now living in Wake County, who told how he was cured of a snake bite by the Williams stone. Driving down from Fredericksburg, Va., was Robert A. Hodge, a foremost authority on madstones, who said that, prior to that afternoon, he had seen only twelve madstones in all his life, but now the number was twenty. J. D. Clark's monograph on madstones is scheduled to appear next year in the *Journal*.

Leonidas Betts





## THE YOUNG SCOTSMAN AND THE BEAUTIFUL MERMAID

by Margaret McMahan

It was in the troublous, tax-burdened year of 1742 that David McLachlan came to the storied Cape Fear country. The tall, rugged, 29-year-old Scotsman wanted simply what was the heart's desire of most men: a chance to develop what gifts and graces God had given him, with attendant prosperity and peace of mind.

David divided his days with work and pleasure, built his rustic castle, explored "New Scotland." Fishing in the Cape Fear was both a pleasure and a profit, and the shad a taste treat new and different. Now was he seized with a curiosity insatiable. What lay above Campbelltown (later Fayetteville), beyond the high ground to the northward? What was the river like at its headwaters?

He began his great adventure in mid June. Four sunsets from Campbelltown found him weary, in the wild country near the river's source. Two small rivers (they would be named the Deep and the Haw) came together to form the liquid highway which David descriptively called the Cape Fear. It was night. Noticeable in the moonlight was a pine that stood at a point where the land rose abruptly into a little plateau. The tree had such a height that, if one climbed it, the upper Cape Fear country would be a telling picture, widespread before him. Yes, he would climb the tree. With eager blood coursing through his veins, he crept and climbed. Finally, David McLachlan stood, tired but triumphant, on a limb in the top of the tall tree.



‡ *The author (121 Hinsdate Avenue, Fayetteville 28305), noted as a local historian, treated this legend more fully in the Fayetteville Observer, July 1, 1962. Mermaids are rare in North Carolina folklore.*



Trembling, he looked with awe on the vast panorama before him. Looking down, he noticed that there were small rockbound islets in the river's bed. One of them was very near. Now strangely, this little island seemed alive with light. Spangled over with twinkling points like stars, it seemed to the tired eyes of the rugged Scotsman an isle of Paradise. Suddenly something moved! David gasped, for what he saw staggered the eye. On the edge of the islet was a female creature, a mermaid, aflame like a glowworm, and like a glowworm, golden. He remembered the stories his mother had told him of the mermaids who played on the isles of Scotland, but he had never seen one.

This mermaid of the Cape Fear was the most beautiful creature he had ever seen! Her slanting, enigmatic eyes were like the sea in the sun, and as changing—now blue, now gray, now green. Her lips were a red rose, her teeth like pearls, her arms richly white, like alabaster, and her small hands were Scottish flowers, pale and petaled. All around her swept a mass of tawny seaweed hair that turned to gold and umber in the moonbeams. From her glistening head to her finlike feet, she sparkled, as bewilderingly bright as the window of jewels in Edinburgh—and as inaccessible. David gazed spellbound, enraptured.

The mermaid seemed to turn a surprised look on the Scotsman. Lifting her long curling eyelashes, she gave him a teasing look, glanced down, then up again, in the most tantalizing way. Perhaps she was a dream—a mirage, without substance. Would she, like a dream, disappear? A scurrying cloud darkened the moon, obliterated for a moment the small island. Was she still there? The cloud moved, moonlight returned. Yes, she remained. She had come from the dangerous sea at the Cape Fear's entrance. She had swum upstream against a strong downward current, because she loved the Cape Fear country, because like him, she was at heart a Highlander. She, who had magic powers, who could be anywhere, had chosen it from all the places she might be.

He, too, loved the Cape Fear country. Suddenly, his heart was full. It was a "bonnie" land. He would adopt it for his own; he would not return to Scotland. With others from his homeland, he would help build a great new country. And always there would be the mermaid, for had not his mother read that these sirens of the sea are ageless and timeless? In the long hard years ahead there would be many moonlit midnights, many opportunities to cast care away, to lighten and brighten his life with the sight of her. Truly he had made a happy choice to claim the Cape Fear country for his own.





## THREE GENERATIONS OF TAG

by Katie Jerome

Children's games, like other types of folklore, are modified through time; yet the cultural motivating factors behind these games remain the same. Various forms of the popular game of **Tag** have always been played in our culture because, as folklorist Brian Sutton-Smith ("Sixty Years of Historical Change in Game Preferences of American Children," *Journal of American Folklore*, 1961, 74:25) has suggested, the concept of capture and pursuit has been, and is, all-important in our culture. But the circumstances under which these games are played change with each successive generation. In this way they also reflect the changing aspects of society, as well as those unchanging aspects. Through descriptions of childhood **Tag** games played by my grandmother, my mother, and me, I will show how these games have changed in form, but not in concept.

My grandmother, Camelia L. Jerome, grew up in Pittsboro. As a child she played the game **Blind Man's Bluff** (*Brown Collection*, I, 61). She describes the game in this manner: All the players except one form a circle. The odd player is then blindfolded and stands in the center of the circle. The circle rotates around the Blind Man several times and stops. The Blind Man then tries to single out one player from the circle and identify him. If he can do so, he joins the circle, and the identified player becomes the Blind Man. If not, the play continues.

My mother, Katherine B. Jerome, also remembers playing **Blind Man's Bluff** during her childhood. Raised at Carolina Beach near Wilmington, she played the game differently in that no circle was formed around the Blind Man; he simply chased the other players until one was caught and identified.

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‡ This article was written for the Introduction to American Folklore course at NCSU, where the author (3212 Dell Drive, Raleigh 27609) is a senior in English.



By the time this game was played by the children of my generation, a major variation had developed. In Raleigh, I played a water game called **Marco Polo**, usually played in a swimming pool. One player closes his eyes and tries to tag the other players, who are moving around him, trying to avoid him. In order to help locate the other players, he repeatedly yells, "Marco!" to which the others must answer, "Polo!" unless they are underwater at the time. In this way the Blind Man has more of an advantage in this game than in my grandmother's version. The adaptation of the game to the swimming pool is significant, because I spent most of every summer day at a swimming pool; it naturally follows that the games we played would be adapted to the swimming pool.

A second Tag game that my grandmother played was **Frog-in-the-Middle** (*Brown Collection*, I, 144). The *Brown Collection* contains ten different variations of this game, none of which exactly matches the game played by my grandmother. She remembers that there were one or two Frogs who sat cross-legged in the middle of the floor. The other children ran around them, saying, "Frog in the sea—can't catch me!" The Frogs tried to tag one of the other players without moving from their positions. A player who was tagged became a Frog.

The simpler and more common version of this game is simply called **Tag** (*Brown Collection*, I, 74). Both my mother and I played this game and several variations of it. One player is It and tries to tag the other players; if he succeeds, the person tagged becomes It. There is usually some sort of base where a player is "safe" from being tagged.

One variation of **Tag** which my mother and I both played is called **Squat Tag** (*Brown Collection*, I, 740). In **Squat Tag** there is no base; a player may not be tagged when he is squatting down. He is allowed three squats during the course of the game.

Several other variations of **Tag** were played by the children of my generation. These usually involved squatting and naming a television commercial or program, an automobile brand name, a famous person, or such, in order to escape being tagged. No two items may be repeated in the same game. In **Freeze Tag**, those who are tagged must freeze in their positions until one of their teammates can tag them, thus "unfreezing" them.

**Cross Pool** is another **Tag** game which was also adapted to the swimming pool. It is played in the deepest part of the pool. All players, except the one who is It, stand on the edge of the pool, ready to dive in and swim to the other side. The one who



is It stays in the water and gives the signal for the divers to start swimming. He, of course, tries to tag them before they reach the other side. Instead of squatting down to avoid being tagged, a player must keep all parts of his body underwater if he is to remain "safe." Those who are tagged must then help the person who is It tag the remaining players. The person who can remain untagged the longest is the winner.

In examining games of tagging and chasing, the question arises as to the significance of the figure It. Often suggested is that the person who is It symbolizes the devil or some other evil force. My mother recalls that usually the 'base' in her tag games had to be made of iron or wood. Newman I. White (*Brown Collection*, I, 74) notes that, traditionally, iron has been used to ward off evil spirits. Wood may be symbolic of the cross. Professor White goes on to say, "The prototype of the 'tagger' in all forms of 'tag' was, of course, the Witch."

This motif of being pursued by an evil force is seen in two of the games I played as a child. One is called **Ribbons**. In this game there is a Devil, a Mother, and a number of Children. Without the Devil hearing, each of the Children is assigned a color to be used as a name. The Devil returns and knocks at the Mother's door, asking for ribbons. When she asks him what color ribbons he wants, he names one color after the other at random. When a child hears his color called, he must run around a predetermined course and back to "home base" again without being tagged by the Devil. A game similar to **Ribbons** is found in the *Brown Collection* (I, 48) under the name of White Witch.

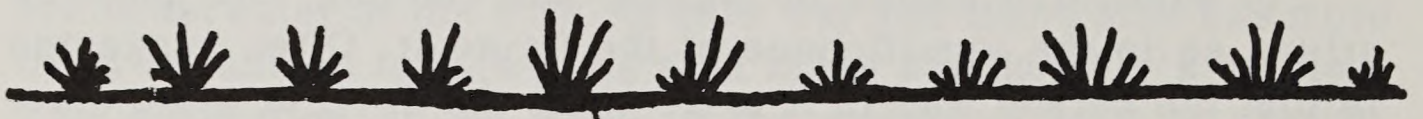
In the game **Bugger Bears**, the evil force is not supernatural; the It figure is a Bear who hides in the dark. (The game is played at night). The other players count to one hundred. When they have finished, they run around the playing area singing, "Ain't no bugger bears out tonight. Grandpa killed them all last night!" At any point he chooses, the Bear runs into the midst of the singers, growling and scaring them. He tries to tag one of them before they can reach the base. The one who is tagged first becomes the Bugger Bear. **Bugger Bears** is similar to a game found in the *Brown Collection* (I, 81), in which robbers hide and scare the singers.

The nature of these two games, and the practice of using iron or wood as bases in games of Tag, seem to suggest that the It figure in Tag games represents the evil forces, supernatural or otherwise, present in our culture. The motivating concept behind these games appears to be that of fleeing from the dangerous or negative aspects of life represented by witch-



es, bears, and so on, to the safer, more positive aspects of life, represented by Mother, the cross (or iron), or even symbols of the material world, for example, automobiles or television programs.

That these games have endured for so many generations seems to indicate the intrinsic value of the recognition of good and evil.



**MOON LORE.** One evening this past summer at a gathering of the Blind Horse Fishing Club of Lillington, a full moon shone down on the members sprawled on the porch of the ancient and dilapidated farmhouse, official headquarters of the group. After the bottle had made its rounds a few times, the talk turned suddenly from bream and bass to the moon and its effects.

"I dread the week of the full moon every month," began our dentist-member. "Every single neurotic in Harnett County comes in with a mouthful of problems, mostly imaginery. They squirm and twist in the chair and pretty nearly wring off the arms, they're hanging on so tight. And I declare, every tooth within a fifty-mile radius that can get abcessed gets abcessed. I had six cases today."

Heads nodded, knowingly.

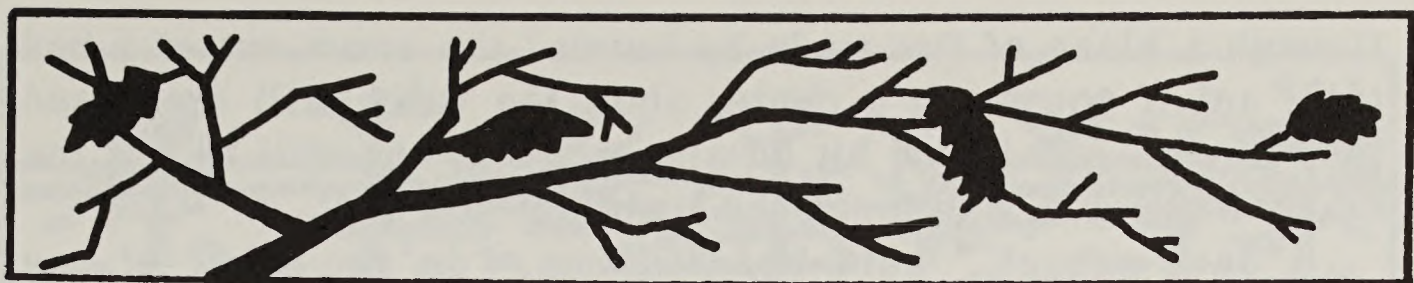
Our highway patrolman, who had rather piously refused to partake of the communal drink, proclaimed his professional dismay: "You're sure right about that old moon doing things to folks. It makes some people plumb crazy. They drive like maniacs . . . not that people don't drive that way anyhow. But the damned fools get out on the highway on moonlight nights and rip and tear up and down the road, senseless-like. I give twice more speeding tickets on full moon than any other time."

I sat listening, dredging up the moon lore I had heard and read, like the reports that obstetric nurses vow there are more births at full moon time than at any other. Then I remembered with a faint shiver the experience I had had in the spring on the "shrink" of the moon. If you dig a hole during the waning moon, the old belief goes, the dirt removed will not refill the hole. Yes, I had had to borrow dirt from the pile at the compost heap to finish filling the holes I dug for the Chinese sedge. And those plants had clinging to their roots great clots of dirt from their original soil.

Who knows? Tides and reproductive cycles, planting, mildly disturbed behavior, infection; and then always lurking lunacy . . .

I felt a little strange that night under the full moon, mysterious and lovely in spite of space probes, perhaps a little stranger than usual.





## NANCY LOUDERMILK, THE WITCH

by Shepherd M. Dugger

"Mr. Berry, it seems that you are having trouble with your ox."

"Yes, I've been workin' that steer five years an' I never knowed 'im to cut such catoes [capers] before."

"How do you account for it?"

"Some thinks he's mad-dog bit, but I believe ole Nancy Loudermilk's bewitched 'im."

"No," put in Harrison, "old Nancy Buttermilk is not in ten miles of here."

"No difference," said Will, "she can bewitch any thing a hundred miles off same as if she wuz right at it. She knowed all about these doin's here today an' I believe she's done it."

"What would she have done it for?" asked Mr. Warner.

"Well, she don't like me. I axed her to let one of her gals go with me to the snake den one Sunday, an' when she wouldn't let 'ur go, she slipped off an' went anyhow, an' she's had it in fur me ever since. I'll shoot 'ur picture with a silver bullet tonight through a blaze of fire, an' ef she's bewitched Dick, it'll be the last steer she'll ever bewitch."

"Mr. Berry, if it is no secret, please tell us how that is done. There has been some trouble about witches up in our country, and we would like to know your method of killing them."

"I don't mind tellin' anybody. You draw a pictur' of the witch with a fire coal, as nigh as you can, an' mould you a silver bullet to load yer gun with. Then you shoot at the pictur'

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‡ The author (1854-1938) was a teacher and engineer in Avery and Watauga counties. Though *The Balsam Groves of the Grandfather Mountain* (1892) is his most remembered work, the dialogue about Nancy Loudermilk is from *The War Trails of the Blue Ridge* (1932). See Phillips Russell's article on Dugger in our issue of May, 1969.



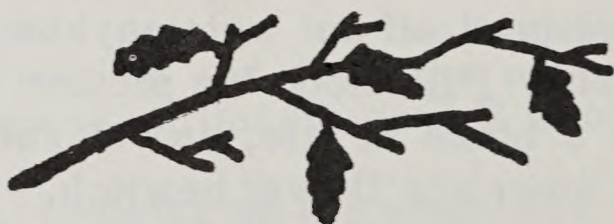
through a blaze of fire made by burnin' the straw out of a bed tick, an' if you hit it a center shot, the witch will drop dead that minute, and if you hit an arm or a leg, she will fall at the crack of the gun, and break the limb that you hit."

"Sure enough," said Mr. Williams, "do you know of any witch that has been shot that way?"

"Yes, ole Nance has been shot once. She bewitched a man's cow an' made 'ur give bloody milk, an' he shot her picture in the hip an' that very moment she fell on the ice an' broke that hip, an' she's been a cripple ever since."

"Could you tell us of one that has been shot dead that way?"

"Dad knows of one, an' he's tol' mam an' us young 'uns about it a many a time. A man's bees was bewitched so that every time his wife churned they'd come in the house an' tried to make honey out of buttermilk, an' the queen bee took some workin' bees with 'ur an' spent the night in a last year's hornets' nest and come back to the hive next mornin'. Their owner knowed they was bewitched because they had never cut such catoes before, so he got a fire coal an' drawed a pictur' on the barn door of the man be suspicioned. When he had loaded his gun with a silver bullet, his wife poured the straw out of her only bed tick, between him an' the pictur'. Then he raised his gun, off hand, and shot through the blaze and hit the pictur' right in the breast, and just as the gun fired, as near as they could tell, that man fell dead."



**TONGUE TWISTERS** collected by Camilla Cournow at Carroll Junior High School, Raleigh (NCSU Folklore Archive):

Does your shirt shop stock short socks with spots?

Lift the ladder.

Later, lisped Lester.

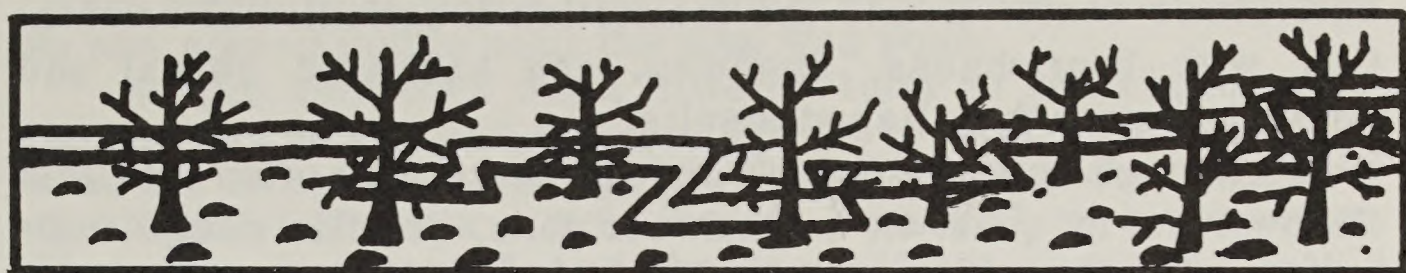
Lester lisped, left  
the ladder later.

The big baby buggy with the red rubber buggy bumpers.

Some shun sunshine.

Do you shun sunshine?





## “STATE” JOKES ON THE CAROLINA CAMPUS

by Sharon Costner

“What’s the difference between culture and agriculture?”

Almost any student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill would immediately answer, “Thirty miles.” To an outsider, this may seem unusual, but most North Carolinians would recognize the question as part of the rivalry between UNC-CH and North Carolina State University at Raleigh. The two schools are separated by thirty miles and a mutual joking disapproval that probably dates from the time of State’s founding as the State Agricultural and Mechanical College in 1889. Since UNC-CH was established nearly a hundred years earlier (1793) as a liberal arts college, a hostility arose between the two institutions which has resulted in vandalism, derisive balladry, and stereotyping through jokes about one another. Since “Carolina” was the “majority culture,” most of the jokes began as jokes on State, the “minority.” Strong similarities can be noted between these jokes and ethnic jokes, especially Polack jokes.

The Polack joke is the most recent kind of joke about ethnic minorities considered inferior by members of the majority culture. The same types of jokes have been told about the Dutch, Irish, Italians, Jews, and Negroes. The Polack joke depends on what are commonly believed to be the characteristics of Polish Americans—brute strength, low intelligence, and uncleanness. (See Mack E. Barrick, “Racial Riddles and the Polish Joke,” *Kentucky Romance Quarterly*, Spring 1970, 15:3-13.) In the case of most State jokes, the stereotyped char-

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‡ The author (Rt. 1, 103 Cricket Drive, Greenville, N.C. 27834) wrote this article while taking Dr. Charles Zug III’s introductory course in folklore at UNC-CH, from which she graduated last May in journalism. She was born in Rutherfordton, went to high school in Greenville, and plans to be a lawyer.



acteristics center around the institution's agricultural orientation with boorishness, stupidity, and backward sexual and social behavior the alleged results.

Although both the Polack and the State joke often manifest themselves in question-and-answer form, popular usage indicates that it is a type of joke rather than a riddle. An attempt to guess the answer is never really part of the folkloric process involved. The answer is not a test of wit; rather, it is more like a punchline. Both types show obvious affinities to tales and anecdotes about numskulls. (See William S. Clements, "The Types of the Polack Joke," *Folklore Forum: Bibliographic and Special Series No. 3*, Nov. 1969, pp. 1-2.)

In the samples collected here, State jokes told as narrative proved almost as numerous as the question-and-answer type. However, more of the informants seemed to be familiar with the shorter question-and-answer type, which is very much in tune with the pace of contemporary culture.

Clements has attempted to classify Polack jokes into thirteen groups according to their major themes, with appropriate subheadings. This collection of State jokes will be grouped more loosely into five categories, and, if a parallel exists in Clements' collection, it will be noted. All of the informants were students at UNC-CH. Their sources for the jokes will be cited if they are known.

### Agricultural Orientation

"Why doesn't State put Astro turf in Carter Stadium?" "Because they wouldn't have a place to graze the homecoming queen."

"Why is every State student an honor student?" "He's out standing in his field."

"How can you tell when a State student dies?" "All the tractors have their lights on." (Clements, K2-1, How to Identify a Polish Funeral. All the garbage trucks have their lights on.)

"Why did the guy from State marry the cow?" "Because he had to." (Clements, H4.10, The Polack's Marriage to a Duck. He had to.)

And then there was this time there was this young lady. She was out in the barnyard and she was milking a cow. And there was this man walking by and he's got this big Y on his sweater. And she runs inside and says, "Mommy, Mommy! There's this man coming up the street and he's got a big Y on his sweater! Now what does that stand for?" She says,



"That means that man's from Yale. You'd better come inside." So she stayed inside until the man was gone.

So she went back out a little bit later on and started milking the cow again, and this man comes by with a great big old **D** on his sweater, and she goes running inside and says, "Mommy, Mommy! There's a man outside with a **D** on his sweater. What does that mean?" And she says, "That means that man's from Duke. You'd better come inside." So she comes inside.

So a little bit later on, she's back out there milking that cow again, and this man comes by with a big **NCSU** on his sweater, and she runs inside and says, "Mommy, Mommy! There's a man out there with a **NCSU** on his sweater. What does that mean?" She says, "That means that man goes to State. You'd better come inside. . . . And you'd better bring the cow too."

This joke was told by Mike, a 21-year-old male student who commented, "My Dad went to State. That's why I love to get jokes on State. He tells me jokes about Carolina all the time, and you just change the names around." The incremental repetition in this tale and the traditional motif of a series of three make it strikingly similar to other folktale types.

### Stupidity

"Did you hear about State's library burning down?" "Both books got burned. And only one was colored in." (Clements, E2.3, The Fire in the Polish National Library. Both books were lost and one of them wasn't even colored in.)

"Why would they give anybody from State an IQ test?" "For the same reason you'd get a bra for a 10-year-old girl. Just in case something develops."

Stan Fritts went to the hospital to have his checkup, and the doctor was just making small-talk with him, you know. He was a football player. You know how everybody likes to talk to the jocks. And he said, "Stan, can you pass a football?" And Stan said, "Yeah, Doc, if I chew it up good enough." (This and the next anecdote were told by a UNC-CH football player about State fullback Stan Fritts.)

They were giving Stan Fritts a test, see, you know, an IQ test. And the guy says, "Listen, Stan, can you count?" (Narrator changes his voice for the two roles.) "Yes, sir, I can count." "Well, Stan, how high can you count?" "I'll show you." (At this point the narrator holds out one hand and counts on his fingers.) "One, two, three, four, five." "Stan, you can count higher than that, can't you?" "Yes, sir, I can count higher than that!" (The narrator then holds one hand over his head and counts.) "One, two, three, four, five." (Clements, F2.13, The



Job Application. A Polack applying for a job is asked if he can count. He counts to five on his fingers. When asked if he can count any higher, he raises his hand above his head and counts to five.)

You know State's first in football and first in basketball, so they decided they wanted to be first in space. But they couldn't go to the moon because somebody had already been there, so they decided they'd be the first to go to the sun. But they were talking to a Carolina scientist, and he said, "You can't go to the sun. You'd burn up before you got near it." So you know what they decided? They decided to go at night. (Clements, E3.10.1, The Polish Rocket. Polacks plan to send a rocket to the sun. In order to prevent its melting, they will go at night.)

Did you hear about the guy from State and the guy from Carolina that got in the big fight? What happened was, some guy from State and a guy from Carolina had a wreck. The guy from Carolina was upset because his car was just totally ruined and it was all the State guy's fault. So he drew a little circle in the middle of the road and told the guy from State, "You go in there, and you stand in there, and you do not move."

So the guy from Carolina picks up this ax and goes over to the guy's car from State and smashes the windows and looks over at the guy from State and he's just giggling. So the guy from Carolina goes over to the side of the car and rips off the door. And the guy from State's just over there laughing.

And the guy from Carolina just can't understand it, so he goes over there and takes all the wheels off and just crushes the car. He turns around and the guy from State is just bawling out laughing. And the Carolina guy says, "What in the world are you laughing about?" He said, "You don't know it, but while you weren't looking, I stepped out of the circle three times!" (Clements, E14.14, The Reckless Polack. A Polack is caught recklessly driving his new car. As punishment, the policeman makes him stand in a corner while he tears the car up. The Polack is amused because he is able to step out of the circle three times without being caught.)

### **Boorishness**

"Why are State's colors red and white?" "Because their necks are red and their socks are white."

There were these two men on the airplane, and one of them's a State graduate, and one of them's a Carolina graduate. And the State man says to the Carolina man, "Did you go to Carolina?" He says, "Sure, how'd you know?" And he says, "I could just tell by the way you knotted your tie, and the way you were holding your fork, and just carrying yourself." And he says, "Well, thank you very much. I did go to Carolina." About



an hour or so later during the flight the man says, "Hey, did you go to State?" And he says, "Yeah, man, how'd you know?" He says, "I saw it on your class ring when you went to pick your nose." (Clements, G3.4, Polish Hanky. The little finger.)

### Backward Sexual and Social Behavior

"You know what the difference between a State coed and a trash can is?" "One gets taken out once a week."

"Why couldn't the two State students get married?" "Because they forgot to study for their blood test." (Clements, F2.3, The Urine Test. The Polack stayed up all night studying for it.)

### Miscellaneous

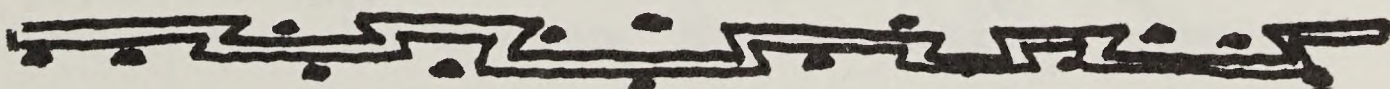
"Why couldn't they hold the Christmas pageant at State?" "Because they couldn't find three wise men or a virgin." (Clements, H1.4.3, Why Jesus Wasn't Born in Poland. They couldn't find a virgin and three wise men.)

There are doubtless more adaptations than those mentioned here. In fact, probably very few of the so-called "State" jokes originated as such. Nearly half of the jokes cited here are direct repetitions of documented Polack jokes.

There seems to have been little change in the humor of the human imagination throughout the history of ethnic or cultural rivalry. One professor remarked that he had heard the same jokes at the University of Texas about Texas Agricultural and Mechanical University.

Does the stereotype work both ways? Certainly the stereotype of the "Carolina gentleman" is well known. For example, "What do you always find wherever there are four Carolina men?" "A fifth." Perhaps the fact that this image is not so negative as the agricultural one has made it less prevalent.

Whatever the case may be, these jokes provide a handy mechanism to release intercollegiate or interethnic hostilities, and they provide perennial entertainment at football games.



**THE BALSAM GROVES OF THE GRANDFATHER MOUNTAIN**, Shepherd M. Dugger's turn-of-the-century folk classic, is now back in print from the Puddingstone Press of Lees-McRae College, Banner Elk, N.C., for \$4.50. Also available is Dugger's **WAR TRAILS OF THE BLUE RIDGE** (1932) for the same price. No North Carolina library, public or private, should be without both titles.



VERBAL PUZZLES

The designation "riddle" no longer suffices to describe the array of verbal puzzles found in circulation. Jan Harold Brunvand in *The Study of American Folklore* describes eleven types; even these do not adequately cover the genre. Some of the following are *over-and-unders* and *non-verbal riddles*. Some are as yet unnamed, as far as we know. These verbal puzzles were collected by Sharon Rimm, a sociology major at NCSU.

F F  
L G L  
A N A  
M O M  
E G E

(1)

THE HOOD  
locking

(2)

Once  
4 P.M.

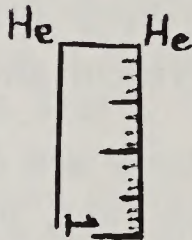
(3)



(4)

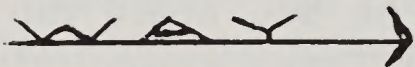


(5)



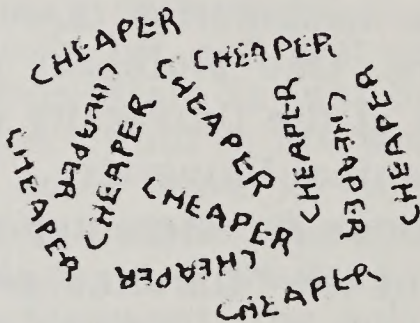
6 ft.

(6)



(7)

T  
I  
P  
P  
E  
R  
A  
R  
Y



(8)

S G E R A A S P O E N  
G R A A S P O E N

(9)

Well  
my word

(10)

(1) Going up in flames; (2) Looking under the hood; (3) Once upon a time; (4) Laying it on the line; (5) Eye shadow; (6) He's one inch over six feet; (7) It's a long way to Tipperary; (8) Cheaper by the dozen; (9) Grapes are in season; (10) Well, upon my word.





## GHOST STORIES TOLD BY BLACK PEOPLE

by Gilbert Cooley

The experience which one has during an encounter with a ghost is generally determined by the purpose of the ghost. If the purpose is to prevent a person from getting something, the experience will probably be frightening. However, if the ghost wants to see a relative or a friend, the experience will be less alarming.

Ghosts have many reasons for leaving the "spirit world." Some of these reasons are pious while others are malevolent. A ghost often aids in the recovery of some buried treasure and at other times he helps to bring justice to a criminal. Some ghosts have also been known to entertain children while the parents were outside or in another room.

Some ghosts have been known to cause misfortune and even death for certain individuals. One informant told how his relative was paralyzed by a ghost. Another informant explained how a ghost caused a fatal automobile accident for a friend who had done him wrong while he was living.

Occasionally, a ghost will frequent a particular area or spot in search of a lost member or part of his body that was not buried with him. Missing heads, legs, and arms are probably sought after more than any other part of the body.

The ghost of the black man is known by many names, but they all refer to the same thing—a disembodied spirit. The ghost is known as a "hant," spirit, token, or a spook. One informant said that there are "No such things as ghosts." He

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‡ The author (Box 586, Rowland 28383), whose "Root Stories" appeared in the February issue of NCFJ, included these ghost stories in his M.A. thesis, "A Collection and Study of Recent Black Folklore" (N.C.A.&T. State University, Greensboro, 1974). He writes that his mother encouraged him to investigate the folklore of North Carolina blacks.



said that there are things called "tokens that one can see if he were born with a veil over his eyes."

### **The Haunted House**

*One of my informants gave me a story his grandfather had told him. The setting is Rowland.*

My grandfather told me about this house that was haunted. He said that one time a family came to move into the house. When they started moving into the house, it caught on fire. They then brought their things back out and left. When they left, the house stopped burning and looked just like it looked before it caught on fire.

He said that this happened many times with different people. He said the house is haunted by the people who died in it. They don't want anyone to move into it.

### **The Man With No Head**

*Another informant told me one of his experiences. An analogue is "Uncle Henry and the Dog Ghost," J. Mason Brewer, in American Negro Folklore (Chicago, 1968), 56.*

My brother Ander and I were going through the woods one night when we saw a man with no head. As we walked, the man got taller and taller until he just went right over the trees.

When we got home, me and my wife had to walk back through the woods. She saw the man again and told me to look, but I didn't because I had already seen him.

### **My Grandmother**

*My informant recounted this story told him by his grandfather. This ghost appeared to have a longing for her past home. Cf. Brown Collection, 7:129, #5673: "If you put a silver dollar under your head, the witches cannot trouble you."*

My grandfather told me that after my grandmother died, she would come back into the house. He said that she would come back in the house and make a fire in the heater and then start dipping snuff. She would do this because grandpa was asleep. Sometimes grandpa would get out of bed and would try to catch her, but she would run out the back door and disappear. He said she would do this a lot of times. She would always come after grandpa had gotten into bed.

One time grandpa shot her with the gun so she would stop coming, but it didn't help. She just ran out the back door and disappeared. So grandpa got mad and decided to put a real stop to it. He then put him a dime in the gun and pretended that he was asleep. When grandma came this time, he shot her with the dime. She ran out but never returned.

### **The Baby**

*The following story was related to me by a man from*



*Dillon, South Carolina, though an almost identical story was told to me by another informant from Rowland. The "baby" in both stories turned into an old man.*

One night me and a friend of mine were walking by a graveyard at night. While we were passing the graveyard, we heard a noise coming from it. We then walked over into the graveyard to see what was making the noise. When we got into the graveyard, we saw a baby crying on one of the tombstones. My friend picked the baby up and then we started down the road toward his home.

As he walked down the road, he noticed that the baby got heavier and heavier. He then looked at it and saw that it had turned into an old man with a grey beard. He tried to put him down but he couldn't. The old man told him that he would never be able to do it until he took him back to the place where he found him. He took him back and left him there. The baby was a ghost!

### **The Accident**

*The informant who gave me this version of The Vanishing Hitchhiker was from Winston-Salem. He probably had also heard the High Point Road version. In this version, the girl was picked up on the Old High Point Road instead of Interstate 40. A similar version is "The Taxicab Driver and the Girl Ghost" in J. Mason Brewer, *Worser Days and Better Times* (Chicago, 1965), 91-92.*

One night a girl and her boy friend were on their way home from a party that was in Winston-Salem. They were on their way home to Greensboro on Interstate 40. It was raining that night and the boy had a wreck on one of the bridges and the girl was killed.

A few years later the girl was picked up between Greensboro and Winston-Salem on Interstate 40 trying to get home. She asked the driver to take her home, and he said he would.

He drove her to the address that she gave him. But then something very funny happened—he looked but the girl had disappeared. The mother of the girl came to the door. The driver then told her what happened. She told him not to be excited because this was not the first time that this had happened. She also told him that that was her dead daughter who had been killed five years earlier.

### **Mother Came Back**

*My informant stated that the promise that her mother made to her has not failed since her mother's death. Cf. Thompson, *Motif-Index* (1956), 2:430.*

Before my mother died, she promised me that she would come back in spirit form, but not in person. Mother said that she would knock three times when she came. It wasn't long after that that she died.



Well, one warm summer night while everyone was getting ready for bed, I heard three knocks. I knew that it was my mother. I looked toward the window and there she was. So every summer on July 20, the ghost of my mother comes into the house.

### **The Enchanted Money**

*My informant, from Rowland, said this story was told to him by his father, and that "enchanted money" was money that was being guarded by a spirit. He stated that during the Civil War, the slave master would take a slave with him when he got ready to bury some money. He would then tell the slave to stay there and guard the money. The slave master would turn as if he were leaving—while the slave was diligently guarding the money—and would then shoot and kill the slave. The slave's spirit would now guard the money. In this story, however, the guardian spirit, along with the two old women, is guarding the treasure.*

My daddy told me this when I was a little boy. It happened when they were living on this man's farm in one of the old houses. And, you see, most of the land around there had been owned by the McCormicks—they were the rich people back in them days. And they say the last two sisters died. But they buried some enchanted money before they died. And they said what made them think that it was some money at the house—say because they be all the time hearing things and get them feeling like people get when they meet a ghost or something.

Well, they—daddy and some more fellows arounds in there—they decided to try and dig that money. So they all got together with their bits of knowledge and everything. So they all decided to make a ring using cups and saucers that were filled with salt, and surround the place where the money was. You see, the evil spirit couldn't cross over that ring. They did this. Then they had a man to get on each corner of the house to watch because the money was right under the edge of the house. After the men got to every corner of the house, they started digging.

After a while, he said they heard something coming through the cotton field. And they looked up. He say there was something that looked like a great big hog coming down through there! It was coming right at them so they ran into the house. He said that after they got into the house, that thing ran under it and just shook that whole house like a tornado had hit it! So that scared them off and they didn't try to dig that money no more.

Somehow the word got out to those professional guys out of McCall, South Carolina. So when they came up there, they brought a man that could talk to spirits. This man brought a Bible and some whiskey with him. He said that if the spirits that were guarding the treasure were drunkards, he could get



them to come to him with the whiskey; if they were religious, he could get them to come with the Bible.

So this man walked down to the edge of the woods to contact and ask the spirits for the money. After the man got down to the woods, Daddy said that they saw the two old women that had died. When the man offered them the whiskey, they would not come. Then he offered them the Bible. One then came close enough to him so that he could talk to her. He asked her for the money and she finally agreed to let them dig the money. And they got the money!

### **The Accident**

*An elderly informant from Winston-Salem gave me the following story he heard early in his life. Cf. Motif-Index, E-275: "Ghost haunts place of great accident or misfortune."*

A long time ago trains used to run in Winston-Salem. One night there was a bad storm. During the storm a drunk man somehow stumbled down on the railroad tracks and was killed by a train.

When the undertakers came to get him, they found all of his body except his head. When it rains, people say they can see the man down on the tracks looking for his head.

### **The Dog Ghost**

*A young woman recounted the following story that had been told to her by her grandmother. Brewer, American Negro Folklore, 56, describes a similar dog ghost as "a great white dawg wid red eyes."*

My grandmother used to walk this dirt road every night from work. Well, one night when she started home a very large dog started chasing her. She ran for a long time and then turned around to see if the dog had stopped running after her. Well, she looked and saw that the dog had disappeared. She said that the dog's tail was lit up like a very bright light. She said the dog "won't nothing but a ghost."

These stories show how a belief in ghosts is deeply embedded in the minds of many black Americans. One also discovers in these stories that the ghosts of the black man may be pious as well as malevolent. The ghost in "Mother Came Back" has good intentions. She wants to see her children occasionally and decides to see them once each year.

Whatever a person believes about a ghost is generally passed on to the next generation. His belief is usually supported by a story but not always. Sometimes a belief is supported only by a proverb or some other witty statement. A familiar proverb, quoted frequently to a person who believes in ghosts, is, "Seeing is believing."





## THE BELLED BUZZARD

by Harry C. West

Of all birds of ill omen, the belled buzzard is among the most terrifying to the people of North Carolina, for he signifies the presence of death and corruption. His blackness, the livid redness of his neck which seems ripped out of carrion flesh, the funereal tolling of the bell around his neck—all strike terror into the heart.

Belled buzzards have been reported in Clay, Davidson, Granville, and Beaufort counties. Most sightings report death to some victim, not caused by the buzzard but by the hand of other men. Most agree that the buzzard cannot be killed.

One story concerns a man named Robert Henry and his uncanny capacity for predicting death. A descendant reported that Henry foretold, among others, not only his two sons' deaths, but his own death as well. Robert Henry was soldier, surveyor, engineer, explorer, teacher, manufacturer, historian, farmer, and physician. Perhaps his medical knowledge enabled him to predict the demise of his acquaintances.

During the last years of his life, he settled in Clay County near Murphy, and farmed there. He kept slaves, but since his needs were few, he often lent them to a neighbor, George Marstellar, who one evening received word that Henry's slaves would not come to work on the morrow as usual. When Marstellar drove over to lunch and to ask what was the matter, Henry replied matter-of-factly that the slaves were digging his grave, for this was the day he would die. So saying, he excused himself after a hearty meal, reclined on a bearskin rug, and was soon fast asleep. Later, when Marstellar sought to awaken him, he was found to be stone dead. The family was summoned, and

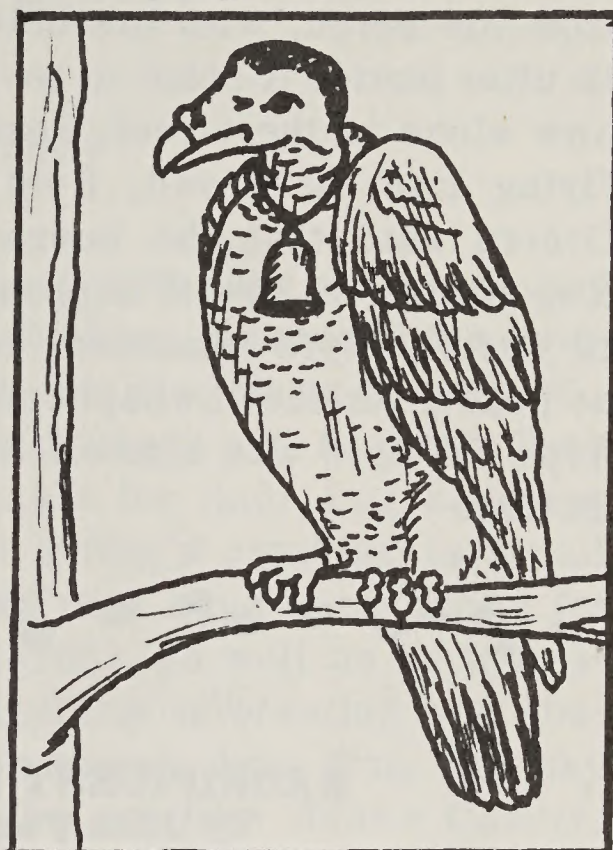
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‡ *The author is secretary-treasurer of the North Carolina Folklore Society.*



then they heard the ominous tolling of a bell. When they looked up into the sky, a buzzard described a wide circle about the Henry farm. The family noted that Robert Henry always made his prediction of death after sighting the belled buzzard, and that this accounted for his accuracy.

Another story, told by Thad Stem, Jr., in *A Flagstone Walk* (1968), is much more violent and terrifying, and reveals the buzzard's malignant and supernatural characteristics. Old-timers in Oxford recall that whenever capital felonies were tried in the Granville County Courthouse, the belled buzzard often perched on the courthouse bell tower, either to monitor the jury's deliberations, or to witness the hanging. One such case is notorious. A man named Wilcox was tried for murder, but he claimed he was 'possum hunting in Virginia with one Ed Byrd. Unfortunately Byrd could not be located to corroborate his story. When the case



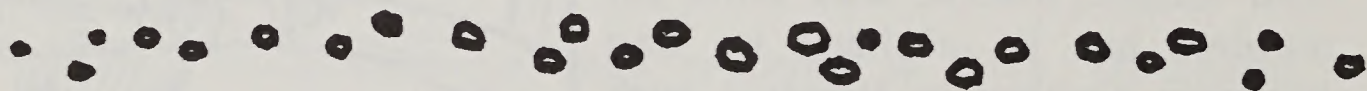
went to the jury, the belled buzzard appeared on the bell tower, creating near panic in the streets outside, and much commotion inside the courtroom. When the jury returned a verdict of guilty, those in the courtroom blamed the buzzard. Someone began tolling the bell in the tower in hopes the buzzard would be frightened off. In the confusion Wilcox broke away from the Sheriff, leaped from the second-floor window and, before a horrified crowd of witnesses, broke his neck on the pavement below.

Wilcox's brother, enraged at the buzzard and believing it caused his brother's death, grabbed a shotgun and discharged it at the vulture. The buzzard calmly rose from the roost and, as a few tail feathers floated down, sailed away to the sound of the death knell. The next day, the buzzard was back on the courthouse tower, even though there was no trial. His presence was explained soon enough when news came that Wilcox's brother was found dead on the road to his home, his horse gone and his neck broken. The buzzard was, of course, blamed for his death. It was further implied that there must be some terrible judgment on the Wilcox family, if not upon the whole town of Oxford.

The second day after the trial, much to the consternation



of Oxford citizens, the buzzard was back upon the tower. Unexpectedly, Ed Byrd showed up, claiming ignorance of the trial of Wilcox and corroborating the details of Wilcox's story. But the townspeople, by now angered and guilt-ridden, felt there was some deep complicity in this turn of events and screamed for ultimate poetic justice: Lynch him! But before the lynching party could leave town, the buzzard flew down from his perch, with his bell ringing, and dispersed the crowd in utter panic. It came to rest on the limb of a tree behind Byrd, now alone in the street. Some said that while the buzzard was flying into the crowd, Byrd was muttering directions to him. Others said that the buzzard came to rest on his shoulder. Regardless of how it happened, the buzzard was seen no more in Oxford. Byrd remained, making a fortune from his winnings at poker, for the townspeople were afraid for him to lose. Perhaps Ed Byrd was himself the terrible judgment on the town of Oxford.



### MAGNIFICENT EXCEPTION

by John Foster West, Boone

Mag Catlett got big minus the service  
of "airy a man," so she swore.  
Her mother made new sheets getting set  
for a new messiah who chose Bull's Branch.  
When Mag's days were finally fulfilled,  
she bore a monster with horns and tail.  
Folks breathed easier when it died  
after growling two days and nights.  
Mag grieved a year and almost starved,  
but would not go again to nap  
in Hill Anderson's big barn loft,  
where she first dreamed an angel came,  
favoring Hill, to fill her neck deep  
in overpowering joy.  
Mag's mother swore the devil horned in  
and swapped babies in Mag's womb.  
Nobody could quite accept the miracle  
of the second coming on Bull's Branch.  
A devil dropped by crazy Mag Catlett  
was much easier to place one's faith in.  
Lem Catlett reminded the doubting Thomases  
the River Jurden wasn't nigh as big  
as Naked Creek, where Bull's Branch  
ended up at finally at last.





## IT'S RAINING FROGS!

by Roger Beatty

Frogs have often been associated with rain in literate and nonliterate societies. The Aymara Indians tortured frogs, hoping to receive rain from sympathetic spirits (Maria Leach, ed., *Standard Dictionary of Folklore, Mythology, and Legend*, Funk & Wagnells, 1950, p. 921). The basis for their frog sacrifice neatly matches the folk belief that a frog's croaking is a call for water (*Brown Collection* 6762). Frogs have been useful for the prognostication of rain (*Brown* 6768), as well as an indication of rain (*Brown* 6772). A particularly interesting and controversial belief is that frogs sometimes drop from the sky during rainstorms (Henry Hyatt, *Folk-Lore from Adams County, Illinois*, Hannibal, Mo., Western Printing, 1965, #1544).

The idea that frogs descend to the earth during rainstorms is greeted with decided polarity. Several residents of Columbus, Ohio, were randomly surveyed about this belief. The typical response from lifelong urbanites was an emphatic "Nonsense." However, the response of migrants to Columbus from rural areas was positive, and is a good example of a rural folk belief remaining part of the oral tradition in a large metropolitan area.

Five people were interviewed about the phenomenon. Lucy Fields, 63, grew up in West Virginia and has been in Columbus for twenty years. Her daughter, Imogene Bolden, 39, is married to Charles Bolden, 43; both spent their childhood years in Mingo County, West Virginia, and have lived in Columbus eighteen years. Eva Gail Bolden, 18, is their daughter and has lived in Columbus all her life. Charles Ray Fields, 26, is the son of Lucy Fields, brother to Imogene Bolden, and has lived in Col-

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‡ The author (624 Oaklawn Drive, Bowling Green, KY 42101), with a B.S. in computer science, is now a graduate student in Folk Studies at Western Kentucky University.



umbus for twenty years. These five people, representing three generations in the same family, believe that it rains frogs.

What happens when it rains frogs? During certain summer rainstorms, little frogs come down with the rain. They land on houses, barns, driveways, cars, and yards. Similar to the plague of Egypt (Exodus 8:2-14), they are so numerous that they cover the earth. Charles estimated there are thousands in a hundred-foot area, "Sometimes you can't walk without stepping on one. You find them on the roads where the cars run over them. There's just so many of them you can't possibly miss them."

No one actually saw them dropping from the sky. According to Imogene, it usually rains frogs during a heavy shower with large drops of rain, and it isn't possible to see the frogs until they bounce on the ground. Charles, Imogene, and Eva have seen the frogs bouncing during rainstorms. Lucy saw little frogs hopping on top of a seven-foot barn shed after a rain. Charles Ray saw frogs hit the windshield of his car. He said that, unless they had the "jumping ability of a flea," they were too small to jump onto his car.

When does it rain frogs? Lucy said, "It's in the summertime. It's in the season when frogs hatch out." Charles remembered that he has seen it occur about once a summer in the first or second week of July. Charles Ray witnessed it in late August, but felt that it occurs more than once a summer. Based on this evidence, it is probable that the seasonal gestation period of frogs combines with proper weather conditions more than once a summer, especially in July and August.

Descriptions of the frogs were consistent. Though small, they were fully formed adults with legs and no tail. Their color was darkish green and brown, with white bellies. Their size was between one-half and one inch, or as Charles put it, "The size of an average marble." Eva said she could hold five frogs in the palm of her hand. The aeronautical amphibians were so tiny that Charles Ray commented, "You wouldn't think they were a frog unless you really saw them."

It was felt that the frogs were ballooned into the air by evaporation. Charles said, "Sometimes you'd see the sun shining on a pond of water and you'd see a vapor drawn up. It must draw the eggs up when it's drawing this water up, because they are so thin and light. They must be microscopic." Lucy added, "I don't see any way it could happen unless the sun would actually dry the pond. You know, ponds always dry up." (Thompson Motif J613.1, "Frogs fear sun's power will dry up their



puddles.”) She continued, “You can see the dried frog eggs.”

What happens to the frog eggs after they are drawn into the air? Charles’s theory was that “they hatch in the outer atmosphere, in the heat that is much warmer than it is here [on the ground], until they get heavy like hail, and they drop back to earth.” Lucy didn’t think they went that high: “Evidently it must draw the little tadpoles up till they hatch. I think the sun draws them up, and holds them over the pond, just draws them straight up, until the moisture passes them out.” The frogs’ complete physical development, combined with their petite dimensions, is a source of mystery. Imogene discussed their small size: “When I’ve seen them, they’ve always been fully formed. I think they are so small because they don’t get the nourishment, and I guess they are caught in an incubator until they’re hatched.”

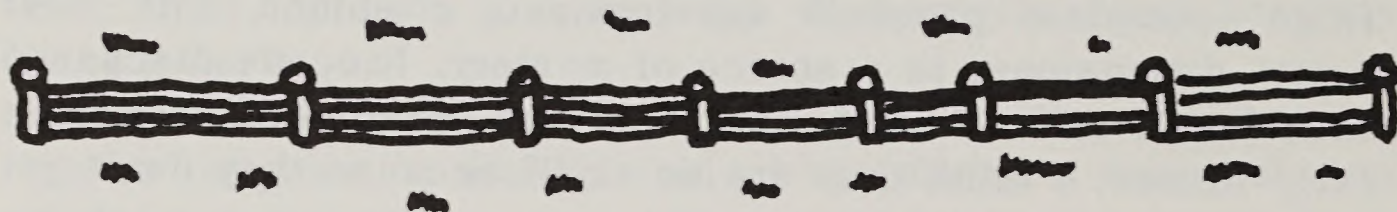
All five believed that the proper geographical features were necessary before it would rain frogs. The prime factor was stagnant water. Copious quantities of stagnant water are found in the ponds, swamps, ditchlines, and puddles in Mingo County, especially between Kermit and Williamson on U.S. 52. Lucy noted that the most common places that it might rain frogs would be “out in the farming sections, not near a town, but out up the hollows, or up creeks, where there are swamps or ponds.”

These observations, made in a traditional folklife situation, have rendered a practical, semiscientific, *folk theory*. The frog eggs are drawn into the air by the evaporation of stagnant water. The frogs are incubated in an embryonic environment, and are fully developed, except their size is inhibited by their confinement. Much like an astronaut in his capsule, they are airborne until they reach a certain weight and fall to the earth during a rainstorm. This simple theory, based strictly on observation, leaves many scientific questions unanswered. What exact conditions cause the egg cells to evaporate from the stagnant water? Do the eggs travel in the air, or must the air currents be at a minimum? Does the barometric pressure affect the process? How long does it take the frogs to develop? Are the frogs actually in a type of incubator?

Raining frogs is a common occurrence in the lives of the people of Mingo County. Charles related, “The old-timers have always talked about it; the young ones have seen it. Pretty well everyone has seen it and they don’t think anything of it.” People will mention raining-frogs to strike up a conversation: “Did you see the frogs yesterday?” Or they will use it to



transmit an observance: "Been frogs coming down in that rain." As Lucy pointed out, "People just say, [the ones] that ever talked about it, it rains frogs. And that's all they say." Imogene put it more enthusiastically, "It's raining frogs! If you don't believe me, come out and look!"



#### Dialect "Receet" for Washing Clothes

1. Bild fire in back yard to het kettle of rain water.
2. Set tubs so smoke won't blow in eyes if wind is pert.
3. Shave one hole cake lye soap in biling water.
4. Sort things. Make three piles. One pile white. One pile cullord. One pile werk britches and rags.
5. Stur flour in cold water to smooth. Then thin down with biling water.
6. Rub dirty spots on board. Scrub hard. Then bile. Rub cullord, but don't bile. Just rench and starch.
7. Take white things out of kettle with broomstick handle. Then rench, blew, and starch.
8. Spred tee towels on grass.
9. Hang old rags on fence.
10. Pore rench water in flower bed.
11. Scrub porch with hot, sopy water.
12. Turn tubs upside down.
13. Go put on cleen dress—smooth hair with side combs. Brew cup of tee—set and rest and rock a spell and count blessing.

—Collected by Julie Smith of Wilmington  
from a Raleigh informant (NCSU Folklore  
Archive)





## FOLKWAYS IN OVID PIERCE'S "THE WEDDING GUEST"

by Douglas J. McMillan

In Pierce's fourth and most recent novel of eastern North Carolina, *The Wedding Guest* (Doubleday, 1974), the reader will note two major changes: first, the time is contemporary rather than as in the earlier novels a hundred plus years ago; and second, the folkways are shared by blacks and whites rather than as in the other novels where folkways are the exclusive lore of the blacks.

A contemporary and changing view of life is experienced, and the past reflected upon, by retired Professor Kirby Wilson. The central theme of the book, I find in these words from Wilson's thoughts in Chapter 20: "When I opened the door and let the outside in, I felt that I stood between two worlds. Everything had changed; nothing had changed" (p. 167). The worlds are the old South and the new South, and Pierce notes the changes which in daily life are often too close to be seen and put into perspective. Folkways are, we know, the constant and at the same time the changing traditions within a culture. Pierce has relied widely on folkways to present his theme of apparent all-change and apparent no-change existing side by side.

Folkways in the earlier novels have already been identified. (See Harry C. West, "Negro Folklore in Pierce's Novels," *North Carolina Folklore*, March 1971, 19:66-72; and Douglas J. McMillan, "Folkways in the Novels of Ovid Pierce," *Cultural Change in Eastern North Carolina*, eds. Erwin Hester and Douglas J. McMillan, Greenville, N.C.: East Carolina University, 1973, pp. 52-62.) Here I attempt to identify and to classify the folkways in *The Wedding Guest*.

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‡ A native of Ohio, the author, founder of the East Carolina University Folklore Archive, is Professor and Director of Undergraduate Studies in English at ECU.



## Proverbs

"... there were more ways than one to skin a cat" [Wilson imagines this to be a comment a redcoat in an ancestral portrait might have made concerning Mr. Eppy] (p. 153).

[Aunt Mathie says concerning Anna] "'Won't that girl ever learn? Her age, I had to learn that lightning never strikes twice!'" (p. 192).

[Mayburden says] "... Don't never turn no worm loose in a child's head . . . ." [Don't tell a child something he can't understand but will worry about] (p. 200).

[Talcot says] "... Everybody has to look out of his own keyhole'" (p. 253).

[Jerry Tilghman says to his son Tolcot concerning himself] "... What's that about the silk purse and the sow's ear? Here's your sow's ear, buddy'" (p. 265).

[A black usage of the same proverb is found as Roxie says to the new bride Anna] "... You done heard about the silk purse and the sow's ear?" (p. 283).

[William said to Mayburden] "... They's plenty fish in the sea'" (p. 310).

## Folk Beliefs

Ritual. [Wilson mentally connects primitive ritual with the actual putting out of a cabin fire] "Here were the rites of a need-fire, when primitive man sought to rekindle the blaze of a darkening, disappearing sun . . . ." (p. 84).

The devil. [Mayburden gives the devil credit for the fire and for other effects] "... The devil's busy tonight. Dolly driving off like a crazy woman. Yard a-fire. Pompey, what you done?" (p. 93).

A spell. [Dolly comments on a spell and fortune telling] "... This place got a spell on it! . . . Tole me off the glass ball. Seen into the future! Two dollars' worth'" (p. 102).

Death signs. [William asks Wilson] "'Do you think people know that they're going to die? I mean—that they get signs or something?'" (p. 129). [William's mother] "... Said wasn't gonna be anybody to take her place but me . . . ." (p. 131).

Lightning as God's wrath. [Lightning struck an oak tree at William's and Anna's wedding reception] "A voice came through the dark: 'Almighty mad with somebody'" (p. 237). [Aunt Mattie said] "'The wrath of God came out of the sky!'" (p. 242). [Talcot, Anne's brother, said] "... Maybe the wrath of God did come out of the sky . . . ." (p. 242).

Sign of coming death. [Mayburden said to Wilson] "'Roxie had got a sign. Whatever it was she'd been looking for all them years. A sign from Miss Estelle that it was time . . . ." (p. 301).

Evil influences removed. [Madam Doreen, Palm Reader and Adviser, has the following in an advertisement] "Removes evil influences that people have done to you" (p. 361).

## Folk Names and Folk Prayer

[Wilson thinks of folk names] "Then, too, I thought of the



old folk names: blackberry winter and Indian summer: the wedding of seasons, when each day partakes of all others—a green-  
ing bud upon a winter’s day and the reddening leaf of fall in  
summer” (p. 74).

[Peegee recites this folk prayer to Joe Pete] “‘Lord,  
bless us and bind us, stick us in the crack where the devil  
won’t find us . . .’” (p. 328).

### Animal Lore

[Talking to animals concerning the dead is very important,  
according to Mayburden] “Mayburden said that there was only  
one way to make an animal give up a search for the dead. She  
knew that it worked for mules and horses, anyway. She’d seen  
it work. You had to corner a surviving animal when he was  
literally languishing for a lost mate and whisper into his ear  
that his partner was dead. Grief was consuming the little gray  
donkey in the pasture until she herself did the whispering into  
his ears, three times, that Petunia, his mate, was dead” (p. 57).

[Mayburden explains cow signs] “‘Go’n be a hot day.  
Them cows tell you! Look at ’em under that tree! They feels  
things coming long before we do. Cold. Heat. Wind a hunnerd  
miles off gits a message to them. I could pretty near live by  
them cows’” (p. 178).

[Percy, the snake “smoker-out,” comments on snake signs]  
“‘Bad luck out here,’ was all he explained” (p. 170).

### Folk Cure

“Pompey said that the ankle now needed real help, some-  
thing besides a wet poultice of mullein leaves” (p. 349).

### Folk Hero

[Jerry Tilghman, Tolcot’s and Anna’s father, had been a  
baseball pitcher] “As an engaging yellow-haired extrovert, he  
rode the flush tide like a folk hero, bestowing his good looks  
and his empty flattery around prodigally” (p. 259).

### Ghosts and Spirits

[Commenting on an old fire and on the outdoors, Wilson  
said] “The faint charred smell was like a banished ghost pry-  
ing” (p. 103).

[Mayburden asks Wilson] “‘You believe in spirits?’ May-  
burden threw this at me so abruptly, for a second I couldn’t  
answer. ‘Spirits?’ ‘Spirits you can’t see but kin feel bresh by  
you’ . . . ‘Ain’t nobody go’n to argue me out of spirits’” (p.  
280).

[Wilson comments] “And he [Wainright] was the boy who  
had read of ghostly rides upon a ghostly horse by a long-dead  
youth [Westhampton]” (p. 357).

### Tales

The two major settings of the novel, Hill Farm and the  
Great Dismal Swamp, provide important folktale-related com-  
ments.



[Concerning Hill Farm, Wilson says] "Hill Farm was, of course, in this long bypassed region, part of local lore. It was as much of an oddity upon the back-country map as was the Great Dismal Swamp, the Civil War fort on the Moratuck, or the famous Indian woods. For the countryside, Hill Farm still held the glow of old names, the great and near-great, something about Washington changing horses there, about Lafayette, about a Confederate general hidden in a basement" (p. 230).

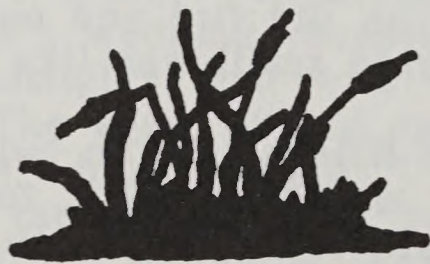
[And later on Wilson also says] "Walter told me that for so long Anna had to confront all kinds of surprising pronouncements from Wainright [her young son who learned from his uncle Tolcot]—about living in slavery times, about Mr. Eppy's foolish education; about living on folk tales" (p. 343).

[Hill Farm was near the edge of the Great Dismal Swamp. Thessal says to Wilson] "... Folks that like to tell tales about it, say plenty of places you can't find a bottom . . . ." (p. 43).

"You like to hear about the swamp? One thing, ain't anybody ever sure. Nobody going to find out. Tales about paddling along, and, ker-plunk, water moccasins has dropped out of a tree right in your boat. Heard tales of snakes in rolling balls. Mr. Wilson, how-come folks love these ole tales? Many a hunter lost! A slave hid where nobody ever found 'im, not even sunlight'" (p. 44).

[And later in the novel, Wilson himself muses on a 1774 map of Carolina and on the lore of the Swamp] "... two centuries [1774 - 1974] of the wildest lore beneath these fading lines: lore of strange animals, of lost bones of hunters and slaves . . . ." (p. 104).

The function of the foregoing lore (both black and white) on the part of the novelist is to show that even during drastic change, there is no change. People are comforted by their traditions, and use them to demand change. *The Wedding Guest* is a novel whose central ingredients and contributors to the settings, the characterizations, and the theme are folkways.



**POOR TABBY.** The little girl was inconsolable when her beloved cat, Tabby, died. Her mother did all she could to relieve the child's grief. Finally the mother said, "Darling, everything's all right. Tabby has just gone to Heaven to be with God." The little girl thought a moment, then sobbed, "What in the world would God do with a *dead* cat? (Collected in Fuquay-Varina; NCSU Folklore Archive)







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# **NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL**

## **MADSTONES**







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Number 1

# NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL

LEONIDAS BETTS, editor

Mrs. Joan Sanchez, compositor      Mrs. Lana Brannan, assistant

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY AT RALEIGH  
Telephone (919) 737-3336

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Special Monograph Issue

## Madstones

*in North Carolina*

by

JOSEPH D. CLARK

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## From the Editor's Desk

The **ANNUAL MEETING** of the North Carolina Folklore Society last November was a joy. Calling us together was W. Amos Abrams, now a solid tradition, with selections on his Grandphone (1885). Maggie Lauterer of Forest City sang beautiful mountain ballads, eight Raleigh dancers led by Ruth Jewell performed intricate steps, and Brian Medas's classical selections on his guitar were simply out of this world. New officers were elected (see foregoing page), and Brown-Hudson Folklore Awards were presented to Doc and Merle Watson, Cratis Williams, and Richard Walser, whose citations will appear in a future issue of the *Journal*. The Sheraton-Crabtree Hotel in the Raleigh suburbs proved to be a pleasant meeting place, with plenty of parking space and a large shopping mall only a brief stroll away. Lena Mayberry, our lovely and vivacious new president, is already planning a great bicentennial program for Friday, December 3, 1976. Put a ring around that date on your calendar.

Also put a ring around July 4, 1976, for on that day the **NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE INSTITUTE**, based at Duke University, will have its 3rd festival at a 40-acre park on the Eno River near Durham. . . . Folklore publications are popping out everywhere, and from Hallsboro High School, Hallsboro, N. C. 28442, comes **KIN'LIN'** with all sorts of good things in it. . . . **EASTER MONDAY** is officially observed as a holiday only in North Carolina, the General Assembly making it "official" in 1935. It all started, said an authority, with the Moravians, who "took Lent very seriously, and after Easter they took a holiday to get back in the swing of things."

Your editor has been elected secretary of the Folklore Section of the **SOUTH ATLANTIC MODERN LANGUAGE ASSOCIATION** for 1976. He will automatically become president in 1977.

For **FOLK SPEECH** enthusiasts: Recently, in rural Harnett County, I heard an old black man describe a young girl as "walking like a Maltee kitten." (Obviously, "Maltese" had been corrupted in transmission.) Furthermore, in making a promise, he said, "If I don't do it, I'll eat snakes and go to the moon." Can any reader supply closely related examples?

Joseph D. Clark (15 Furches Street, Raleigh 27607), whose monograph on **MADSTONES** follows, is an expert on superstitions and folk medicine. We have all enjoyed his many contributions to the *Journal*.

Leonidas Betts





## *Madstones In North Carolina*

by JOSEPH D. CLARK

his monograph presents a survey of madstones in North Carolina: their ownership, physical origins and characteristics, their uses in treating wounds made by rabid animals or otherwise, their efficacy as reported by owners or other informants, and the views of believers and unbelievers as well as of those neutral or uncommitted.

The literature of folk medicine indicates that for several centuries many of the folk of the Orient, Europe, the British Isles, and America believed without reservation in the magical power of madstones, supposedly originating as hair or fiber balls in the stomachs of ruminants such as the deer or cow or buffalo, somewhat as did the bezoar supposedly from the gall bladder of an animal. (In 1709, John Lawson's *A New Voyage to Carolina* noted that a powder made from the bezoar was blown into the eyes to strengthen the sight and brain.) Some madstones, infrequently called snake stones and lodestones, were tabasheer, a sort of opal found in the joints of bamboo in Burma, Hindustan, and neighboring countries. Other madstones were picked up in open fields or river beds, thus probably associated with halloysite, a clay mineral occurring in soft-white or light-colored masses.

According to tradition, these stones were usually cleansed in warm water or fresh milk, then applied to wounds made by mad dogs, snakes, spiders, etc., to absorb the venom. After having drawn out the poison and falling from the wound, they would again be cleansed in the same kind of liquid, which usually turned black or green, and bubbled or oozed at the top. They could be reapplied for an indefinite period, but they would not stick to a wound if there were no venom in it. Occasionally the person applying the stone would cut with a lancet across the wound, or two or three inches above it, to draw a flow of blood to assure better treatment.

This general information is reflected, in a number of ways, in *Madstones* (1972) by Robert A. Hodge of Fredericksburg, Virginia. In his survey of madstones in Virginia and other areas, he included references and materials about more than a dozen madstones in North Carolina. Special appreciation is due to



Professor Hodge and to many others for their contributions, which are acknowledged in the following digests.

The forty-six digests range from the most enthusiastic proponents of madstones, through the more-or-less straddling, to the opponents or skeptics. This list of stones, chiefly from Piedmont North Carolina, is a fairly large sample that in some ways is far more self-revealing than any commentary on it.

## 1. POINTER MADSTONE

*Owners. Version 1:* Samuel Pointer (1836-1915) inherited the stone from his grandfather, Captain Pointer, Hyco, Halifax County, Va., who received it from a traveler for his room and board; fragments of it in hands of descendants. *Version 2:* Fragments of it in hands of Pointer family, Person County, N.C. *Version 3:* Samuel Pointer in will of Jan. 7, 1915, stated: "I give and devise to my four daughters my  $\frac{3}{4}$  undivided interest in the madstone owned by myself and George W. Barnett, said Barnett owning one fourth interest." *Version 4:* According to Benjamin T. Thorp (close friend of Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire) of Goshen, Person County, a traveler almost a hundred years ago gave stone to Captain Pointer, near Woodsdale, Person County, after traveler gave demonstration of provoking his snake to bite himself, then applied stone to wound but fell off, and then applied it to a rabid cat that died from poison. *Version 5:* Kate Pointer is willed stone by sister Susan, of Roxboro, on April 27, 1951. *Version 6:* Before War of 1812 a traveler from India (thus "India Stone") gave stone to Captain Pointer, who sold it to Green Williams, Joseph Pointer, and Haywood Pointer; later Samuel Pointer, grandson of Captain Pointer, bought  $\frac{3}{4}$  interest in it and George Barnett bought the other one fourth. In 1915 the  $\frac{3}{4}$  interest descended to three Pointer daughters, Susan, Kate, and Emily, and then Susan acquired Barnett's one fourth. The "India Stone" was reported to be, in four fragments, in the School of Medicine, University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. (Note: On May 12, 1975, Dorothy Long, Assistant Librarian, Division of Health Affairs, UNC at Chapel Hill, wrote in part about the "India Stone": "Dr. W.R. Berryhill, former dean of the School of Medicine, . . . assures me that it does exist, though he is not sure where it is.") *Version 7:* The last sister "willed the stone to the Museum at Raleigh." (Note: A check with the Division of History and Archives revealed no evidence at this time to show its custody in Raleigh.)



*Stone. Version 1:* Fragment, but two to three times as large when whole. *Version 2:* Fragment, quickly absorbent and cleansed in warm water on surface of which greenish substance appeared. *Version 4:* From maw of deer according to the India traveler, 2¼ inches at greatest dimension, irregular shape, weight equaled "one silver dollar, one silver dime, and two five-cent pieces," lighter than soapstone, close fine texture, beautiful smooth surface, deep pink, slightly porous and sticking for many hours, cleansed in fresh milk or warm water which turns greenish hue and effervesces; patients became nauseated, sleepy, and vomited. *Version 6:* Black and slick, washed in warm water, spongy "although careful examination failed to show that the stone was of porous material." Before application of stone, the wound was scratched to draw blood to assure better treatment. *Version 7:* The stone "was not pink, but a dark gray and in two pieces—one the size of a butter bean and the other about 1/3 that size."

*Cures. Version 1:* Writer's brother and father's two Negro boys, bitten by mad dog, were cured, but hogs bitten by same dog died from poison. *Version 2:* J.H. Blackwell, Reidsville, bitten by mad dog and cured by fragment of the Pointer stone. *Version 4:* According to Ben Thorp, his grandfather Benjamin P. Thorp went 30 miles to borrow stone from Pointer, gave \$1,000 bond for safety of stone, to cure a Negro boy. *Version 6:* At "Pointer Vista," Person County, stone was first applied to a bitten horse. Horse was cured, but other bitten horses, not treated, died. Kate Pointer stated that persons from hundred-mile radius came for treatment and were charged \$100; fee later reduced to \$20. According to *New York Times*, May 3, 1885, Pointer stone cured son of a Mr. Harrison, of Salisbury. *Version 7:* "When he [Great-grandfather Pointer] died, he left it [the stone] to his oldest son. Sam Pointer, with the agreement that no Pointer kin should ever have to pay a fee. I never heard of any family paying and I have been hearing tales since 1900." "They used said stone about one hundred and fifty years, and said no case was ever lost." "He preferred the patient to come and be fed and lodged there."

*Comments. Version 1:* The writer states: "Were I bitten by a mad dog, I would certainly pay a visit to Pointer's in preference to Paris, feeling assured that I would receive quite as much benefit and at a far less expense." *Version 4:* See Bishop Cheshire's comments under Lockett Madstone (2). *Version 6:* The late Kate Pointer said: "My father loved it [the stone] better than he did his

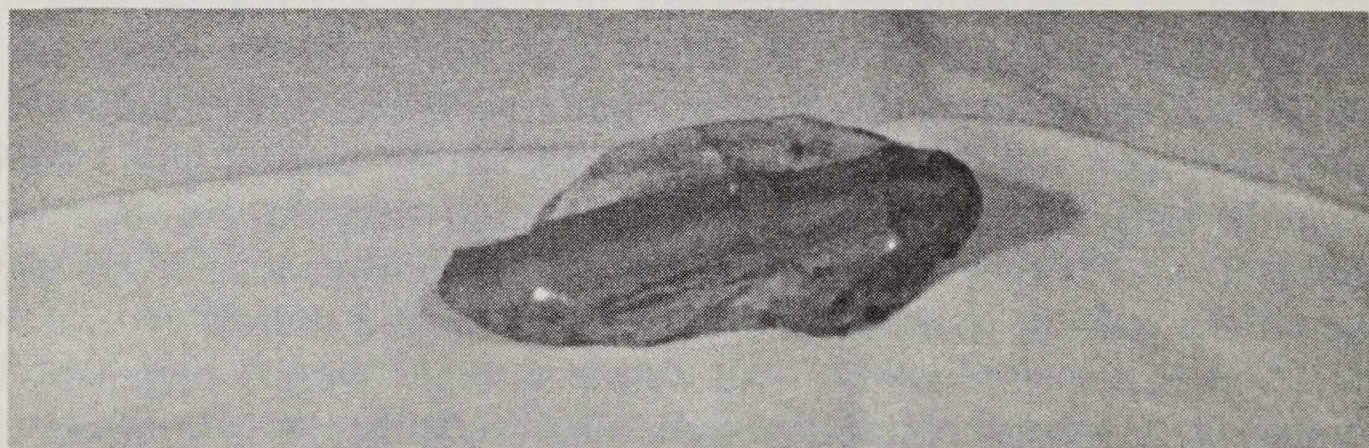


children . . . no diamond could have been guarded more closely.”  
*Version 7*: “The family valued it as you might the Hope Diamond . . . that stone went as far from his roof as you could throw a bull by the tail.”

*Sources. Version 1*: Letter to *Free Lance*, Charlotte County, Va., Feb. 9, 1886. *Version 2*: *Alexandria Gazette* (Va.), June 29, 1886. *Version 3*: Will of Samuel Pointer, Will Book 20, Roxboro, Person County, Jan. 7, 1915. *Version 4*: Joseph Blount Cheshire, *Nonnulla* (Chapel Hill, 1930) pp. 204-210. (See note covering the article by N.A. Crawford in sources for the Lockett Madstone.) *Version 5*: Will of Susan Pointer, Will Book 22, Roxboro. *Version 6*: Howard Jones, “Magical Stone Was Once Roxboro’s Top Attraction,” *The Courier-Times* (Roxboro), Jan. 7, 1965. *Version 7*: Letter, May 14, 1975, to me from Mrs. B.G. Gumpton, Rt. 2, Roxboro, She is great-granddaughter of Captain Pointer.

## 2. LOCKETT MADSTONE

*Owners. Version 1*: Man named Lockett, of Mecklenburg County, Va., was given stone by strange traveler who had previously given a similar stone to Captain Pointer (1); Lockett in 1880 or 1885 gave this stone to the Hon. Robert T. Thorp, late member of Congress, for his legal services; and later he gave the stone to his brother, Ben Thorp, a special friend of Bishop Cheshire. *Version 2*: Ben Thorp gave the stone to Dr. John R. Currin (1852-1917), a veterinarian of Granville County, who in turn handed it down to Roy B. Currin (1887-1946), who left it to his son, J. Nelson Currin, Rt. 4, Oxford.



*Lockett Madstone, important because of its association with famous Pointer stone, is owned by J. Nelson Currin, Rt. 4, Oxford.*



*Stone. Version 1:* According to traveler, stone from deer's maw, absorbent, to be cleansed in fresh milk or warm water which becomes "slightly tinged with greenish hue." *Version 2:* Two inches long by one inch wide, curved to fit a finger or nose, very smooth and flat surface, light weight, with shades of orange, pink, and mingled white.

*Cures. Version 1:* Stone, still in use in 1904, effected following cures: 1. Two little daughters of a Mr. Currin, both bitten by mad dog. 2. Young son of James Hart, bitten by rabid dog. 3. Augustus Wilson, living near Stovall. 4. In 1894 Richard Slaughter, bitten by snake, went to Ben Thorp's stone after Dr. William Thorp, who had seen Negro boy relieved by stone, advised him to do so. 5. Negro boy, son of Jeff Satterwhite, bitten by snake, was given some whisky before application of Thorp's stone.

*Comments. Version 1:* "My friend Ben Thorp is dead, and I do not know what has become of the 'Lockett Stone.' I suppose the days of the mad-stone and the divining rod are passed and gone. But when an intelligent and truthful man tells me of things which happened under his own eyes, I cannot help wondering what may be the explanation of the phenomena." *Version 2:* No doctors used the stone, but anyone needing its healing powers could go the Currins' home and use it without charge. "The present owner [J. Nelson Currin] has seen and witnessed its successful use many times." "Years ago the stone was used quite frequently, but there are not many calls for its use now since rabies is better controlled and more people rely on a medical doctor for treatment." We are still convinced, though, that it works. It is a cure for any poisonous snake bite, black widow spider bites and mad dog or any other rabid animal bites."

*Sources. Version 1:* Joseph Blount Cheshire, *Nonnulla* (Chapel Hill, 1930), pp. 204-210. (Note: This work was summarized, with no acknowledgement of the source, by N.A. Crawford in "The 'Mad-Stones' of Person and Granville Counties," *The State* (Raleigh), November 10, 1934, and reprinted therein, April 1975.) *Version 2:* Letter, dated July 12, 1975, to me from M.M. Evans, Rt. 4, Box 380, Oxford.

### 3. GRAY MADSTONE

*Owners. Version 1:* W.P. Gray, Methodist minister, acquired



the stone with instructions on its use from a British doctor in 1875. *Version 2*: In Gray family for almost hundred years; since 1954 stone held by Willie Gray, sone of W.P. Gray and husband of Mollie Gray, the mother of Mrs. Mary Ferguson, and by present owner (in succession) Warren Cook, Garysburg.

*Stone. Version 1*: No known source, broken from fall, 1½ inches long x ½ inch wide, brown, spongy and absorbent, cleansed in warm water. (Some say only in fresh milk.) *Version 2*: Stone used until 1950, supposed to be from maw of deer, flat disc somewhat like baby turtle, size of quarter dollar, striated with brown and orange streaks, smooth and shiny, exposed interior spongy, and cleansed only in clear water, which bubbles while being cleansed. *Version 3*: Insignificant brown-colored rock, resembling a half-moon.

*Cures. Version 1*: Ben Gray, still living in Roanoke Rapids, son of W.P. Gray, bitten on right arm, cured in two days after father scratched wound and applied stone, and had three scars left on his hand. Negro boy, bitten by moccasin, cured in seven days. Rufus Green, livestock dealer of Richmond, Va., bitten by rabid horse. Mrs. Moody, a Negro, of near Gaston. Mrs. Davis, of Bertie County. Joe Scott, of Northampton County. And six members of Charlie Cook family, of Halifax County. *Version 2*: Ben Gray and Mrs. Mary Ferguson, when a girl, cured in a week, for boils and wounds by insects. Among many Virginians who came to have Mollie Gray apply stone were two horse dealers, bitten by rabid horses, after all other remedies failed. Joe Scott, bitten by a snake, was cured in ten days. An unnamed man was cured by Mollie Gray in eight days. *Version 3*: The Gray family, skeptical about the healing quality of their stone, stored it in a safe place, but it was brought out when Ben Gray was bitten on the right hand by a dog. The stone stuck to his hand for two days and later, after cleansing, was repeatedly applied for a week. As popularity of the stone increased, more and more persons and animals were treated. A small boy, severely bitten by a moccasin, took treatments for a week. In 1894 A.W. Farris, now of Durham, when a boy in Greenville County, Va., was bitten by a mad dog that caused the deaths of some cattle. The Gray stone was applied to his wound for twenty hours and then fell off. His father paid \$10 for the effected cure and also received a sack of flour and a country ham.

*Comments. Version 1*: Mrs. W.P. Gray, who applied stone for 13 years, stated that the stone had been applied for 74 years with



few failures. Mrs. Mollie Gray said: "The most of them [the doctors] think it a fake, but I know it works because I have seen it." Ben Gray stated: "I was in a bad state when my father thought about the stone and put it on me. But within a week I was back at school and the hand was back to normal size." *Version 2*: Patients came to home of Grays to stay as long as necessary for cure; cost \$15 to \$25 for treatment, food, and sleeping accommodations. Mrs. Furguson said that twelve to eighteen hours were required for spider bites and eleven hours for dog bites. Doris Duncan writes: "To those who have been cured by it, or have seen it work on their loved ones, there is no doubt about its efficacy." *Version 3*: Mrs. Warren Cook said: "Reliable people told us that the stone never failed. Patients boarded at the Gray home until they were cured; of course, there was a charge." She further stated: "People, particularly the young, don't believe in a madstone like they did years ago. And of course the doctors don't think much of it, but then there is the history of it. You can't change that." A.W. Farris said: "I wouldn't recommend the madstone now, but if I didn't get medical treatment if bitten again I'd say, 'Get to that madstone quick.'"

*Sources. Version 1*: Leonard O. Dudley, " 'Mad Stone' Said to Work," *News and Observer* (Raleigh) October 30, 1949. *Version 2*: Doris Duncan, *Daily Herald* (Roanoke Rapids), February 16, 1972, sec. 1, p. 11. *Version 3*: George Lougee, "Madstone Once Prized as Poison Bites Cure," *Durham Morning Herald*, June 29, 1975, pp. 1-2.

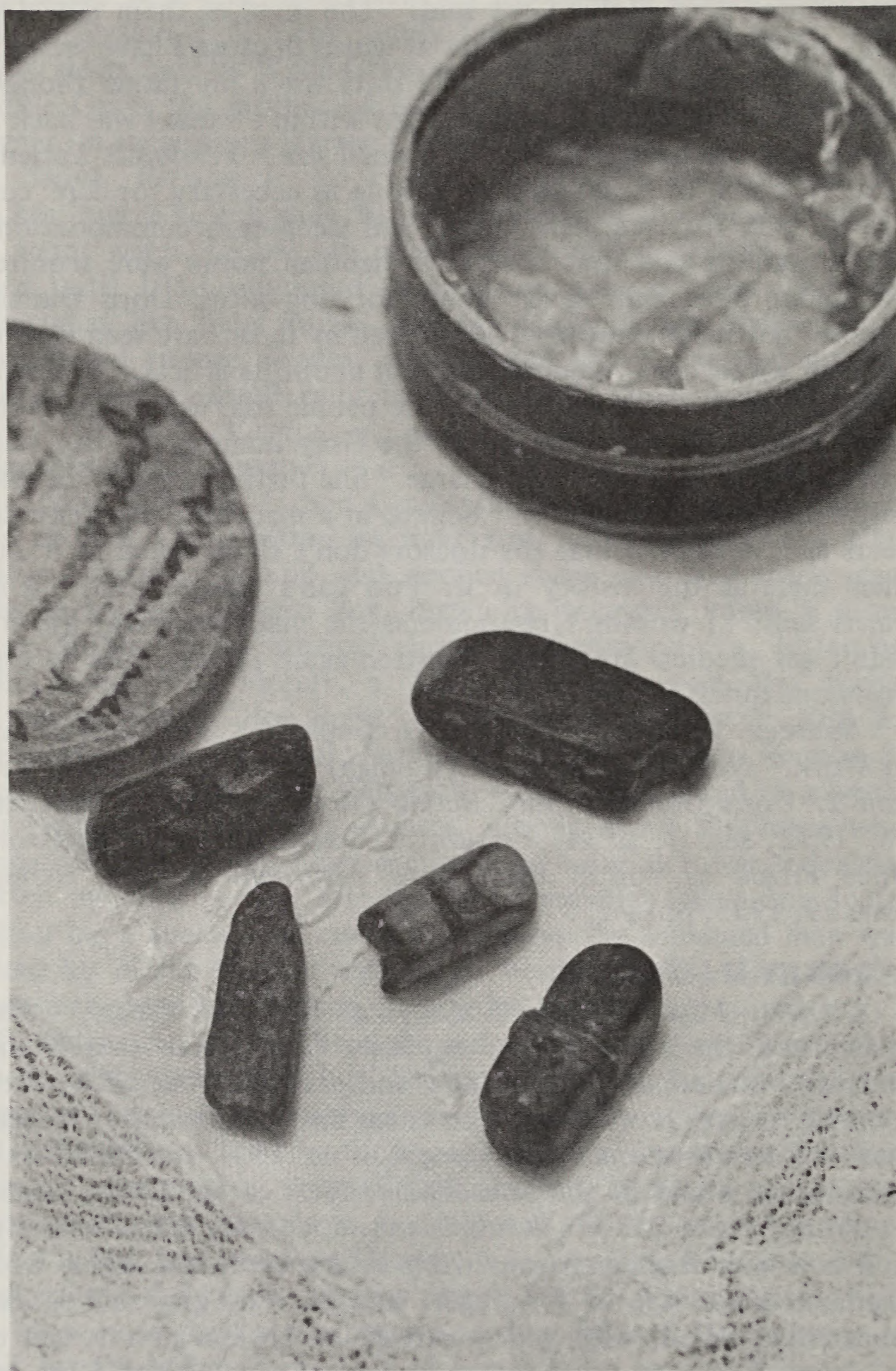
#### 4. RONEY MADSTONE

*Owners*: Miss Cornelia Roney, called "Aunt Neely," who transmitted the stone to her nephew, Pleas Nixon (see Nixon Madstone immediately following), and presently owned by Mrs. John M. Baker, Haw River, who came into possession of it after death of her husband, who bought it in 1931 for \$2.50 as a curiosity at a sale of the household effects of the Dixon estate.

*Stone*: From a deer's stomach and supposedly from Germany, in five ½-inch fragments caused by cleansing in hot ashes. Each fragment about size of forefinger, smooth, dark-gray and similar to petrified wood, with yellow streaks at broken points, and to be cleansed only in warm water on top of which green scum appears.

*Cures*: Under application by Miss Roney, an unnamed man, warned by Mr. Nixon of the uncertain power of the stone, later





*Roney Madstone, originally owned by Cornelia Roney, known affectionately as "Aunt Neely." Photo by David Rolfe, courtesy of Burlington Times-News.*



borrowed stone to apply to his wound; no report of what happened. Only one person, a very small Negro boy, went mad because his mother took him away with her before treatment had time to draw out the poison. It was used effectively on Mrs. Mildred Batten, of Blanche Street, and Ralph H. Wellons, of Stagg Street, both of Burlington. Mr. Wellons, now 82 and formerly of Crossroads Church, was bitten by a mad dog during his youth; he was taken to Miss Roney's home in Haw River, where he stayed for six days. His father paid for the treatment, room, and board. In fact, small fees were charged those who needed treatment for all services.

*Comments:* Mrs. Baker declared: "My husband warned the unnamed man about the danger of using the stone." "The late Dr. J.C. Wilkins told me that several persons who were treated after being bitten by dogs that were really mad, and not one of them developed rabies. He said it looked like there must be some virtue in the stone, but he preferred the rabies shots." The stone while being cleansed "did not bubble up green poison as some claim. Mr. Dixon said there were only a few bubbles." Ralph Wellons stated in no uncertain terms after his treatment by the stone: "It works!"

*Sources:* Letter, May 10, 1975, to me from Mrs. John M. Baker, Haw River. Also, Margaret Boothe, "Magic Madstones Still Here," *Daily Times-News* (Burlington), May 11, 1975, with photograph of five fragments of Roney Madstone.

## 5. DIXON MADSTONE

*Owners:* Alec Dixon, Rt. 1, Haw River, Alamance County. Stone now possessed by Mrs. John Baker, Haw River.

*Stone:* Absorbent, cleansed in water on which green scum appeared.

*Cure:* Mother of writer of letter stated that Mrs. J.G. Albright's brother (67 if he were living) at age of nine, when bitten by mad dog, taken to Dixon's home every day for about two weeks for treatment for almost eight hours each time.

*Source:* Letter, April 2, 1975, to me from Mrs. J.G. Albright, Rt. 1, Haw River.

## 6. BUNDY MADSTONE

*Owners:* Henry Bundy, 2108 East Walnut Street, New Castle, Ind.; his father, Henry Bundy, Sr., bought a fragment of it from an old Indian woman in North Carolina and took it in 1815 to New



Castle, where it was kept in a safety box of the First National Bank.

*Stone:* Fragment, soft bone-like, one inch long by ½-inch wide by ¼-inch deep, light-brown with brilliant crystalline and varied colors, absorbent, spongy, and cleansed in milk that turns a "dark-green hue."

*Cures:* Henry Bundy, Sr., affected by scrofula, cured within two months by Indian woman in North Carolina; E.R. Hillman, barber of Indianapolis, cured of serious illness in 1903 after stone applied 13 hours; and a boy, bitten on both lips by mad dog, cured by stone applied 60 hours.

*Comment:* "Several people bitten by mad dogs have been treated with this wonderful stone, and one is yet to be found who has ever suffered any ill effects from the bite."

*Source:* *News Leader* (Richmond, Va.), March 11, 1903, p. 6.

## 7. BAGBY MADSTONE

*Owners:* George K. Bagby, dental surgeon, New Bern, who gave it to sister, Lou Fannie Bagby, married to Benjamin F. Oakes in 1852; Oakes gave it to daughter Effie, who married William Stevens Carter; then entrusted by Effie (now 90) to Mrs. Thornton Tysinger.

*Stone:* Fragment lost, ¼-inch thick and nearly one inch square, soapstone gray.

*Cure:* Three-year-old son of Carters, bitten by mad dog, cured in three weeks at home of Oakes; later bitten by rabid cat and returned to Oakes for treatment and healed.

*Comment:* "Mrs. Tysinger has seen the stone applied a number of times."

*Source:* Interview by Robert A. Hodge with Mrs. Thornton Tysinger, Rt. 1, Halifax, Va., April 28, 1975.

## 8. NEAL MADSTONE

*Owner:* A.F. Neal, Box 205, Stokesdale, Stokes County, inherited stone from great-grandfather and in family over a hundred years.

*Stone:* Not described.

*Cures:* Stone served four counties: Forsyth, Guilford, Stokes, and Rockingham.

*Comment:* Neal states: "People would come and stay at their home for days, and they never lost a case."



*Source:* Letter, April 4, 1975, to me from A.F. Neal, the owner.

## 9. SPACH MADSTONE

*Owner:* Theophilus Spach (1843- ?) bought it from an Indian peddler who said it was from the liver of a deer; now on display in Moravian Museum (Boy's School Annex) of Old Salem.

*Stone:* About 1½-inches wide by ¾-inch thick, roughly triangular, smooth, reddish and jasper-like.

*Cures:* Cures for rabies caused by mad dogs; stone successfully applied twice to Mrs. George Woosley.

## 10. APPLE MADSTONE

*Owners:* A man named Apple of Caswell County, who sold stone for \$200 to an unnamed man who had heard about Apple's two sons' being cured.

*Stone:* Taken from a horse, killed by Apple who did not have time to take sons to Pointer stone.

*Cures:* Unnamed sons, one of whom had a fit, bitten by a mad dog, and cured by the Apple stone.

*Source:* *Farmer and Mechanic* (Raleigh), Dec. 3, 1884, p.1, as quoted from *Reidsville Weekly*, November 27, 1884.

## 11. "MACNEILL" MADSTONE

*Owner:* Capt. R. A. Shotwell, editor of *Farmer and Mechanic*, Raleigh, as of May 2, 1885 valued it at \$50. Senator Hamilton MacMillan brought stone to Raleigh from Georgia in January 1885.

*Stone:* From bladder of deer, size of hen's egg, slightly flattened, smooth and apparently sandpapered, buff in color, porous and absorbent, cleansed in tepid water or sweet milk, falls from wound after stone absorbs poison.

*Cures:* "MacNeill" stone has two cures similar to those made by "Pointer" stone (1) in North Carolina and those in Georgia. The "Fauque" stone in Virginia has a better record than the "MacNeill" stone.

*Source:* *New York Times*, May 3, 1885, p. 7.

## 12. BUTLER MADSTONE

*Owner:* Man named Butler, Charlotte.

*Stone:* Absorbent, sticks to wounds for two hours or more, apply further if necessary.



*Cure:* Quoting *Charlotte Observer*, June 7, 1885, the young son of William Littles, of Mecklenburg County, cured after stone applied two hours and then fell off; stone then cleansed by boiling in milk and reapplied to wound for one half hour.

*Comment:* Again from the *Charlotte Observer* (same date): The application of the stone was "witnessed by a doctor and several citizens, and they were inclined to faith in the madstone cure. Young man Littles expressed himself satisfied that the madstone has saved him."

*Source:* *Farmer and Mechanic* (Raleigh), June 10, 1885, p. 3. (Note: This source on February 11, 1885, advertised "A genuine Georgia Madstone for sale." No owner mentioned; weight 2½ ounces; fifty-year record of curing several persons.) By courtesy of Robert A. Hodge, Fredericksburg, Va.

### 13. NEWTON (?) MADSTONE

*Owner:* Unnamed person of Newton,\* where stone might be borrowed by persons living elsewhere.

*Stone:* Absorbent and sticking.

*Cure:* (?): Little son of C.F. Rink, Amity Hill, Iredell County, about seven months old and bitten by a mad dog. Rink went to Newton to get stone, which at that time was in High Point, where he secured the stone and brought it to Amity Hill. There Rink made eight applications of the stone to the wound; the first application lasted one hour and ten minutes, and the second application one hour. No report about the results.

*Comment:* "We are interested to hear further from this case."

*Source:* *Piedmont Press* (Hickory), August 14, 1886. By courtesy of the N.C. State Archives. \*Stone may have been owned by one of the Weedons; see Madstones of Iredell County below.

### 14. NADING-BEARD MADSTONE

*Owners:* H.A. Nading and a Mrs. Beard, Winston-Salem.

*Stone:* Called a "lodestone"; from a deer's stomach; 1 inch by ¼ by 2, gray and smooth.

*Cures:* Mrs. Charles Jones and son Hester M. Jones in May, 1899; Mrs. Jones bitten on arm and Hester on leg; stone, used alternately on them, stuck an indefinite time and fell off; cleansed in boiling sweet milk before applied to wounds; green scum on top of milk during cleansing.

*Source:* Hester Jones, 4400 Robin Hood Road, Winston-Salem, in letter to Robert A. Hodge, September 5, 1972; also in



letter to Hodge, July 18, 1972, from Col. L. N. Mosley, Ret., 3781 Milhaven Road, Winston-Salem. (Note: Col. Mosley cites reference: "The Madstone, a Medical Curio," *Journal of Illinois Historical Society*, Cheely, 53: 409-13.)

## 15. RAGANS MADSTONE

*Owners:* Joe Ragans, Person County, found stone some ninety years ago while plowing; inherited by niece, Mrs. Stanhope Conner, near South Boston, Va., and later by her daughter, Mrs. Lewis Chaney.

*Stone:* Supposedly from liver of deer, absorbent and sticking to wound if poison in it, cleansed only in lukewarm water.

*Cures:* Mrs. Conner lists the following: 1. Son, Easley, bitten by mad dog at age of 6 or 7; stone on wound 24 hours. 2. Young girl, bitten by black widow spider. 3. Woman while cutting cabbage bitten by copperhead. 4. John Oakley, Rt. 2, South Boston, Va., after stone stuck 24 hours; Oakley had implicit faith in the stone. 5. Mrs. Oakley, sore on foot and from fear of poison from mad puppy, had stone applied, but it did not stick.

*Comments:* Oakley tried to swap five-year-old horse for Ragans's half interest in stone, but Ragans refused; likewise he refused to sell to a physician of Roxboro. Later Dr. George Stover, South Boston, Va., tried to buy a fragment of it from Mrs. Stanhope Conner, who declined.

*Source:* "Found Some 80 Years Ago, 'Mad Stone' Still in Use," *Record-Advertiser* (South Boston, Va.), ca. 1940-50. (Robert A. Hodge, Fredericksburg, Va., saw stone in 1973.)

## 16. HESTER MADSTONE

*Owners:* Eight-four-year-old Mrs. Lily Hester, 1226 Virginia Ave., Roanoke Rapids, whose husband when a boy received it from relatives; probable heir, Maynard Hester, her son, 2131-A North Hills Drive, Raleigh; in families over a hundred years.

*Stone:* No known source, cracked by boiling water and now bandaged together, about 1¾-inches long and ¾-inch thick, partially triangular, groovey length-wise, light and resembles whetstone, grayish, slick and smooth, porous, and cleansed in warm water.

*Cures:* Mrs. Lily Hester and husband applied stone and saw persons being cured. Walter, brother of Maynard Hester, cured after mad-dog bite, so Walter firmly asserts.

*Comments:* Mrs. Lily Hester kept stone in a trunk during



past sixteen years, not being used for some time.

*Source:* Mrs. Maynard Hester, interview, April 28, 1975.

## 17. YELTON MADSTONE

*Owner:* Adam Yelton, Rutherford County, N.C.

*Stone:* Not described excepting its absorbing quality; to be applied after cleansing in milk and following the shaving of the hair about the wound.

*Cure:* John Smith, of Lincoln County, cured in 1895 and witnessed by the informant, C.C. Dalton.

*Comments:* (by the informant): "I will tell you a true story about a madstone that happened about May 8th, 1895. I was about 10 years old and I am 90 now. It is a long story but I don't know any other way to do it. Our house and John Smith's house were about 125 yards apart. On a Sunday morning Mrs. Smith called about 8:15 and said for my Dad to come up there and help her get John to the house. He had gone behind the smokehouse, vomited and fainted. We brought him in the house and had him sitting up in bed when he went into a hard fit. They got the local doctor up there that evening and he said John had hydrophobia. He called four other doctors in Charlotte which was about 25 miles away. Away they came in a 2-horse buggy and they agreed with Dr. Goode who was very young. My grandmother had lived in Rutherford County. She had a neighbor who had a madstone. The doctors said it wasn't worth anything, but they would give it a try so they sent after Adam Yelton and his madstone that was 33 miles away. Mr. Yelton came on Wednesday night. First he bathed the madstone in milk and then shaved John's leg. Then he bound the madstone to the bite where it stuck tight for 13 hours. After he had bathed the stone in milk again, he put it back on the bite for another 3½ hours. After a couple of hours Mr. Smith quit talking out of his head and went to sleep for the first time in four days and three nights. I think he slept about 30 hours and he wouldn't eat a bite when he woke up, just drink sweetened whisky or brandy. He was awfully weak for a long time, but he got well and went back after a year to laying brick. He built several brick buildings still standing on S. Lafayette Street in Shelby."

*Source:* Letter from C.C. Dalton, Vale, Lincoln County, to Professor Rogers Whitener, Appalachian State University, Boone, and published in his "Folk-Ways and Folk-Speech," *Watauga Democrat* (Boone), September 4, 1975.



## 18. SPARROW MADSTONE

*Owners. Version 1:* Father [Hudson Sparrow] transmitted stone to son, F. H. Sparrow, Chapel Hill; stone in family for many years. (Note: Stone seen by writer and Professor Raymond Adams on June 2, 1937, in Sparrow home.) *Version 2:* Hudson Sparrow, who bought stone from "an old woman before 1900," left it to F. H. Sparrow; now in possession of a daughter in Chapel Hill. *Version 3:* Hudson Sparrow, who bought the stone from a Dr. Beasley for \$20, left it to son Fred (presumably F. H.) Sparrow; stone currently held by Mrs. Mazie Pickett, now living on Highway 54 in Orange County, and formerly married to a descendant of Fred Sparrow.

*Stone. Version 1:* Chipped from fall, one inch x 5/8 inch, bevelled on edges, black and somewhat ebony, absorbent and clinging to wound until venom removed, to be cleansed in soapy water on top of which green bubbles appear. *Version 2:* Supposedly from an elephant's stomach, small, round and smooth, dark-brown, absorbent, and cleansed in water that has a green ooze, after treatment of wounds caused by spiders, mad dogs, etc.

*Cures. Version 1:* "Victims of dog-bite, spider-bite, and snake-bite are brought to Mr. Sparrow from Georgia, South Carolina, and Virginia." Dr. B.B. Lloyd, a Chapel Hill physician, sent several patients to this madstone. *Version 2:* Stone cured colored lady in Chapel Hill and Byrd James of the I. D. Byrd family of Durham. *Version 3:* Numerous persons and more than a hundred cows and horses cured by the Sparrow madstone. Earl Byrd, 3009 Dixon Road, Durham, while living on farm in Orange County, had a brother Leroy bitten on leg by black widow spider. "Dip" Byrd, their father, took Leroy to Fred Sparrow's stone. Earl stated: "Mr. Sparrow put the stone into some milk and then to Leroy's bite for an hour and 15 minutes. It drew out the poison. It came out in some sweet milk. He got all right and there is no doubt it, the stone took out the poison." Mrs. Charles Martindale, a daughter of Fred Sparrow, witnessed the curing of Leroy as well as the healing of a woman bitten by a rabid cat and the curing of a bitten horse.

*Comments. Version 1:* "It [the madstone] is kept in a very ancient, clasp-closed box, and is carefully wrapped in a soft cloth." *Version 2:* "After it was placed upon a bite, it could not be moved. All on its own it stayed until all the poison was sucked out." "Its last remembered service was about 1939" when the Jones child was taken from Durham for treatment at the Sparrow



home. *Version 3*: "Mrs. Pickett said she didn't have much faith in the madstone, but would probably use it as a last resort."

*Sources. Version 1*: Eston Everett Erickson, *Folklore* (London), 49 (1928) 165-166. *Version 2*: Letter, May 12, 1975, to me from Mrs. O. N. Yergan, 3710 Hulon Drive, Durham. *Version 3*: George Lougee, "Madstone Once Prized as Poison Bites Cure," *Durham Morning Herald*, June 29, 1975.

## 19. BROOKS MADSTONE

*Owner*: Edward Brooks, Kimberly.

*Stone*: Cleansed by soaking in water, with green poison bubbling up, not mixing with the water but oozing up "in a little stream."

*Cure*: Mrs. Allie G. Mundy, of Person County and the mother of P.T. Mundy, of Burlington, reported that her father, who was bitten on the leg by a mad dog, went to the home of Edward Brooks for treatment by his stone; he stayed there for four weeks with the stone "fried to the bite."

*Comment*: Mrs. Mundy declared: "I know that stone did its work because my daddy never went to a doctor and he was CURED."

*Source*: Margaret Boothe, *Daily Times-News* (Burlington), May 25, 1975.

## 20. THOMPSON MADSTONE

*Owners*: William B. Thompson, community of Mineral Springs in Alamance County, probably inherited it from Uncle Alec or Joseph Thompson of same community; stone inherited in 1949 by Edward Leon Madden, grandson of William B. Thompson, Box 117, Saxapahaw.

*Stone*: Fragment, ¼-inch wide and long, probably ¾-inch to 1-inch long before being broken, sloping on edges, black and shiny.

*Cures*: Grandfather Thompson told his grandson about several marvelous cures by the stone.

*Source*: Edward Leon Madden, interview, March 29, 1975.

## 21. TEER (?) MADSTONE

*Owner*: Unnamed person living in or near Durham.

*Stone*: Absorbent, applied to wound with bandage, cleansed in pail of milk that turned green from poison in wound, and several applications might be necessary.



*Cure:* In 1903 Nello L. Teer's father, then fifteen years old and living on Burch Avenue, Durham, was bitten on his lower right leg by a "spreading adder" or a "highland moccasin." A nurse applied stone several times with a bandage; swelling disappeared and wound healed satisfactorily, but left a lifetime scar about the size of the son's forefinger. The father's younger sister, ten years old when the injury occurred and now seventy-nine, affirms that her brother was cured as stated above.

*Source:* Nello L. Teer, letter, September 13, 1972, to Robert A. Hodge, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

## 22. BUFFALOE MADSTONE

*Owners:* W. D. Buffaloe, farmer living near Montlawn, Highway 401 South, Raleigh, bought it from a stranger in 1905 for \$7.50; stone inherited by his daughter, Mrs. Connie E. Wilson, now sixty-six years old, 235 Grand Avenue, Raleigh.

*Stone:* 1½ inches long by 7/8 inch wide x ½-inch deep, rectangular, weighing about four to five ounces, light-brown with reddish tinge, porous, smooth and well polished, and easily cleansed in fresh warm milk only.

*Cures:* Stone applied only by Mrs. W. D. Buffaloe at her home and without charge; numerous persons, including a Winston-Salem man, cured successfully after being bitten by mad dogs, snakes, spiders, etc.; only one person, a child from Auburn in Wake County, died from poison from animal because of waiting three days before taking treatment.

*Comment:* "My brother, James Buffaloe, still living, says he would use the Buffaloe madstone if he were bitten by a mad dog rather than take the rabies shots."

*Source:* Mrs. Wilson, interview at her home, April 9, 1975.

## 23. FARMERS' MADSTONE

*Owners:* About twenty farmers on Knotts Island, Currituck County.

*Stone:* Called snakestone or madstone, about size of silver dollar, porous and absorbent, cleansed in warm milk or water.

*Cures:* S. J. Waterfields, of Knotts Island, and Bushrod Waterfields, of Woodleigh, the former bitten on the hand by a rattlesnake or cottonmouth moccasin and the latter on the hand by the same snake, after application of stone which was filled with poison seven times. The same stone saved the life of John Beasley, bitten by a mad dog that also bit several dogs, which died after non-treatment.



*Comments:* Unnamed informant stated: "I know of at least ten cases which have been treated and I never knew a failure. I have witnessed the operation myself and know that it never fails to cure." The stone "is considered more valuable than diamonds."

*Source:* *Forest and Stream* (New York), June 10, 1905, p. 453. By courtest of Robert A. Hodge, Fredericksburg, Virginia.

## 24. DORSETT MADSTONE

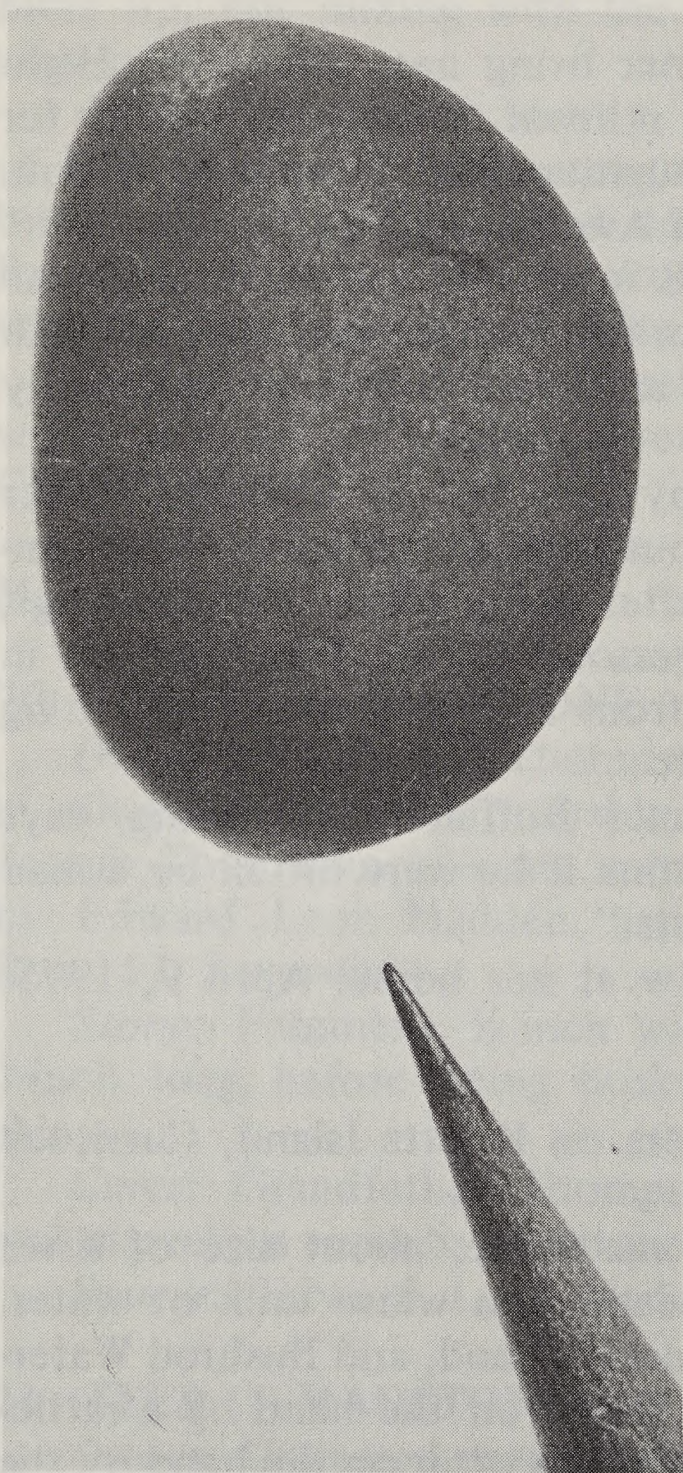
*Owner:* Mrs. H. P. Dorsett, Lexington.

*Stone:* Absorbent.

*Cure:* On November 23, 1907, Leon Brown, son of Frank A.

Brown, of Spencer, was bitten by a mad dog while visiting his grandparents at Mount Pleasant. He was taken immediately to Spencer where the stone borrowed from Mrs. Dorsett was applied to his wounds. "The stone adhered for several hours and apparently relieved the swollen flesh on the limb of the suffering child . . . . The child is improving and it is believed will recover."

*Source:* "Bitten By A Mad Dog," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, November 26, 1907. By courtesy of the N. C. State Archives.



*Harris Madstone. Photo by William M. Shields, Clinton, S. C.*

## 25. HARRIS MADSTONE

*Owners:* Great-grandparents, William Henry and Martha Lloyd Harris, formerly of Nova Scotia and later of Warren County; then David and Laura Harris Pirie; then daughter, Mrs. H. M. Rowland, who gave stone "in a little shiny bag" about twenty years ago to her son, Jasper Rowland, 66, formerly of Henderson, now of Clinton, S. C.



*Stone:* From Nova Scotia (perhaps previously from Scotland), in perfect condition and without blemish, pear-shaped, 1 1/8 inches long by 1 1/6 inches wide by 3/8 inch deep, light mahogany, smooth and polished, and cleansed in warm milk.

*Cures:* After man bitten on top of his hand in 1908, stone when applied to wound, stuck fast and could not be shaken off until all venom absorbed; child bitten by mad dog in 1913 and apparently cured when stone was applied to wound; and another man, bitten by a spider in 1915, was cured by stone that was administered by a male member of the family.

*Comment:* Mr. Rowland said: "The folks, who used or observed the application of the stone, stated it would work as an antidote to the venom of mad dogs and other animals."

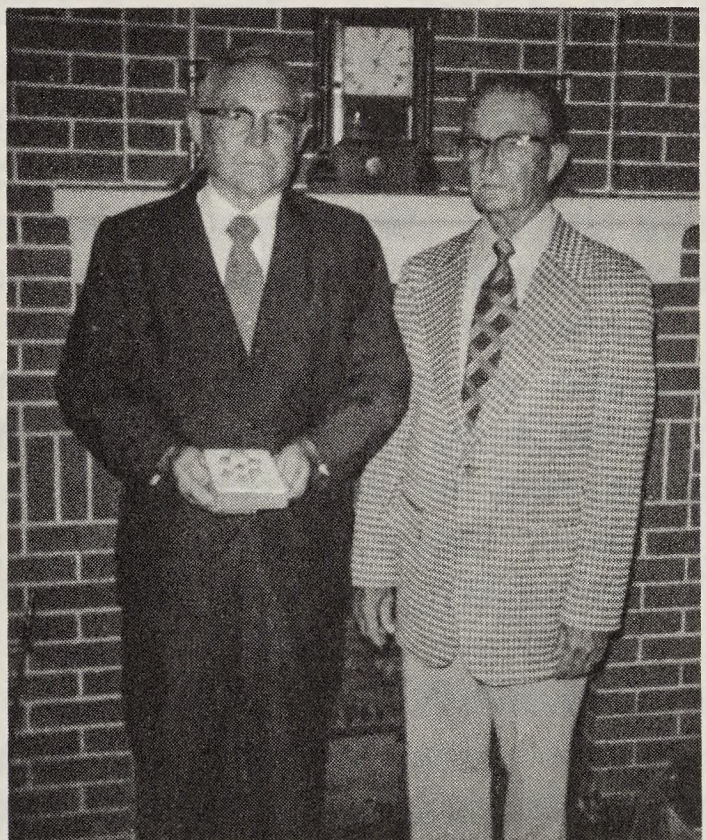
*Sources:* Telephone interview, Jasper Rowland, Clinton, May 14, 1975; and letter, May 30, 1975, from Mrs. George T. Dickie (granddaughter of the Piries), Henderson.

## 26. WILLIAMS MADSTONES

*Owners:* W. Benton Williams (b. 1830), who willed ten madstones to his grandson, L. Beecher Williams, born near Apex, now living at 2470 Stevens Road, Raleigh.

*Stones:* Eight whole stones remain after two lost by cracking, some of them 1/4 inch by 1/2 inch but largest 1 inch long by 1/2 inch wide by 1/4 inch thick, mostly gray but largest white, some slick, absorbent, sticking on wounds about 3 hours depending on length of time after being bitten, cleansed only in warm water or fresh milk.

*Cures:* W. Allison Williams, father of Beecher, lanced or pierced wounds before stones applied; several persons treated by him. Jack H. Wood, 66, bitten by snake when about ten years old, and his father, bitten



*L. Beecher Williams (left) holding eight Williams madstones, one of which cured Jack H. Wood (right) of snake bite at age of ten.*



by mad dog, cured by Williams' madstones; Jack H. Wood was given a shot of whisky before the application.

*Comments:* Wood said: "Seventy-eight cases of snake and other bites were cured; no application of stones failed to cure victims." Beecher Williams stated: "One Bertram Allen, bitten by highland moccasin, almost died; he recovered slowly without use of stone. I think it a possibility that such stones were effective in curing those bitten."

*Sources:* Interviews, Beecher Williams, April 30, 1975, and Jack H. Wood, Millbrook Road near New Hope Church, Raleigh, April 2, 1975.

## 27. WALTERS MADSTONE

*Owners:* John Walters, Blanch, Caswell County. Stone, bought from an old Indian for a pint of whiskey, for years in the Walters family, some of whom still living in or near Blanch.

*Stone:* 1½ inches long by ¾ inch wide by ½ inch deep; black; absorbent and sticking; after falling off wound, cleansed in warm sweet milk which turns dirty brown.

*Cures:* In 1918 six-year-old Holland Phillips, his brother, and black boy, bitten by rabid pet dog, were sent in a buggy or surrey by Holland's father, a farmer in Caswell County, to home of John Walters, of Blanch, five miles away; Holland cured after stone stuck one hour to his arm, and Negro boy cured after five hours of applying the stone; the stone cleansed in warm sweet milk, which turned dirty brown; Holland's brother apparently not affected by the bite since stone would not stick to his wound.

*Comments:* Father of Holland said: ". . . the pet dog was rabid and we have to go to the madstone." Holland writes: "I remember how my father told us that it saved our lives, and he was glad that Mr. Walters had the mad stone."

*Source:* Letter, April 7, 1975, to me from Holland Phillips, 617 Rauhut Street, Burlington.

## 28. POPE MADSTONE

*Owner:* Elijah Pope, Sr., Dawson's Cross Roads, Tarborough; stone procured by Pope from the granddaughter of a Revolutionary soldier.

*Stone:* Absorbent of poison from mad dogs, snakes, spiders, etc.

*Cures:* General.

*Comments:* "Mr. Pope has been called upon several times to



apply the stone since it has been in his possession, and has been successful in every case."

*Source:* Tarborough (N.C.) *Free Press*, October 21, 1848. (Quoted in *Folklore*, London, 1938, pp. 165-66.)

## 29. PERSON COUNTY MADSTONE

*Owner:* Unknown.

*Stone:* Not described.

*Cure:* "The children of Mr. W. S. Shaub's family, who were bitten by a mad dog, some nine weeks ago, have returned from their visit to Person County, North Carolina, which had the desired effect, in so far as, with other remedies previously applied, to relieve the minds of the anxious family."

*Comment:* A few persons, in 1858, are willing to use the mad-stone today.

*Source:* *Peoples Press*, Salem, N. C., July 2, 1858. By courtesy of the N. C. State Archives.

## 30. LEHMAN MADSTONE

*Owner:* Squire P. T. Lehman, Winston-Salem, N. C.

*Stone:* Absorbent and sticking to wounds.

*Cures(?):* On April 15, 1907, two young boys, Oscar Locke, son of L. L. Locke, and Donald Wagner, son of John Wagner, on Liberty Street, Fairmont, N. C., were bitten by rabid dog, Oscar on the palm of hand and Donald on shoulder and arm. Squire Lehman applied stone to wound on Wagner boy for one and a half hours and to Locke boy for several hours. No statement about the results.

*Source:* "Attacked by Mad Dog," *Charlotte Daily Observer*, Charlotte, N. C., April 17, 1907. By courtesy of the N. C. State Archives.

## 31. J. H. WEEDON MADSTONE

*Owner:* John H. Weedon, Mount Vernon, Rowan County, in 1886; he was the great-great-greatgrandfather of Mrs. Vicki Yount, the source of the following transcribed report from the ledger of her old relative. "March the 27, 1886. In these days of mad dogs, it should be generally known there is a genuine Mad Stone in Scotch irish township, rowan County; it is owned by Mr. John H. Weedon now living on the plantation of Mr. W. W. Fraley. His address is John H. Weedon, Mt. Vernon, rowan county, N. C. ritten buy F. C. Turner."



*Source:* Letter, March 4, 1975, to Professor Rogers Whitener, Appalachian State University, Boone, N. C., from Mrs. Vicki Yount, Rt. 4, Vale, N. C.

### 32. DOWNS MADSTONE

*Owner:* W. B. Downs, Rt. 10, Lexington; he found madstone in 1911 or 1912 in Macon County.

*Stone:* One inch in diameter by one inch in height, cone-shaped, and porous.

*Cures:* No record of being used.

*Comment:* "As I was quite young at the time, I almost threw it away but fortunately my father saw it and believing it to be a madstone told me we would tie a cotton string around it and lay it on hot coals. If the string tied around the stone did not burn it would be a real madstone. Upon reaching home, he did just this and the string burned up to the knot securing the madstone and then stopped."

*Source:* Letter, March 17, 1975, to Professor Rogers Whitener, Boone, from W. B. Downs, Rt. 10, Lexington.

### 33. JONES MADSTONE

*Owners:* Harlen Jones, Cedar Mountain, Transylvania County, who bequeathed it to his daughter, Dixie Jones Lane, who sometime later donated it to the Y.M.C.A. Parker Lodge at Camp Greenville at Cedar Mountain, where it is now encased in the walls of the Parker Lodge.

*Stone:* Originating somewhere in western North Carolina, shaped like a large kidney bean, smooth, brown on the exterior, and tan on the interior.

*Cures:* None reported.

*Comment:* "Never used to my knowledge."

*Source:* Letter, May 18, 1975, to me from Dixie Jones Lane, Cedar Mountain.

### 34. PROFFIT MADSTONE

*Owner:* Charles W. Proffit, only owner, Boomer.

*Stone:* Regurgitated by cow and found in feed trough in stock barn about 1955.

*Cures:* Apparently never used.

*Comments:* "This hairball or madstone, when found, had bits of finely chewed hay adhering to it, which indicated that it had been regurgitated with the cud and dropped into the feed trough."



*Source:* Letter, May 12, 1975, to me from Charles W. Proffit, Rt. 1, Box 384, Boomer, N. C.

### 35. CHURCH MADSTONE

*Owners:* Fletcher ("Fletch") Church, Rt. 1, Purlear, N.C.; inherited by his grandson, Mitch Wesley Wiles, and then by his daughter, Mrs. Merrill Wiles, North Wilkesboro, through her mother who died when she was 91.

*Stone:* From a deer's stomach, perhaps in Idaho, 2½ inches long by 1½ inches wide, smooth sides.

*Cures:* None.

*Comments:* "I do not believe my parents were aware of any curative power or, if they did, they evidently weren't believers since no one in the family ever heard it talked; however, the stone was preserved and saved all these years, so they certainly placed a value on it for some reason."

*Source:* Letter, March 10, 1975, to Professor Rogers Whitener, Appalachian State University, Boone.

### 36. FLOYD MADSTONE

*Owners:* James Bell Floyd, who bought stone from an Indian for a night's lodging; inherited by Henry C. Floyd and his daughter, Mary Floyd Allen, the mother of G. Alvis Allen, now living on Rt. 1, Creedmoor.

*Stone:* Size 1 inch by 1½ inch, weight ½ ounce, dark-gray with reddish tinge, and slightly porous.

*Cures (?)*: John Moss, of Cannady's Mill Road, Kittrell, bitten by a mad dog in 1914; used on his three brothers at same time; they also took the Pasteur treatments.

*Comment:* "I have talked with Mr. C. R. Blackwell, Rt. 4, Oxford, N. C., and he does not know of anyone that was cured by a madstone."

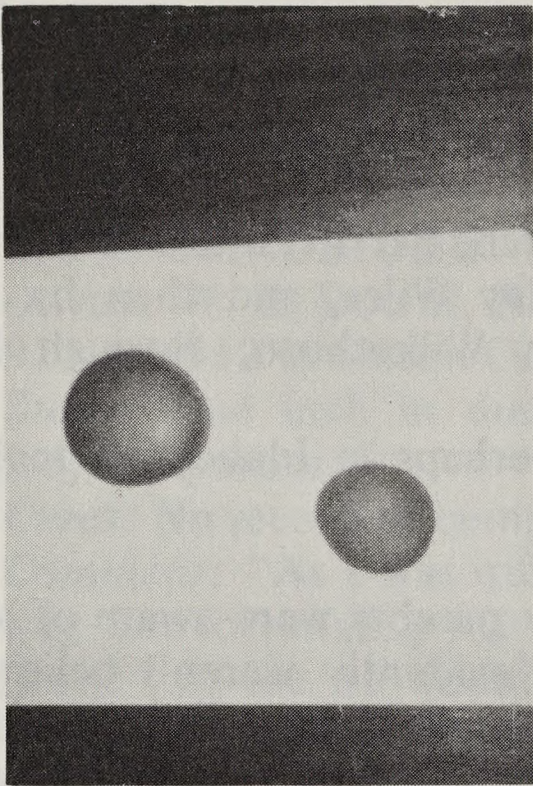
*Source:* Letter, June 13, 1975, to me from G. Alvis Allen, Rt. 1, Creedmoor.

### 37. WILSON MADSTONE (1)

*Owners:* Dr. Joseph E. Wilson (1857-1925), Rt. 3, East Fork River, Canton, N. C.; stone willed to his wife, Mrs. Mann Wilson, who passed it on to daughter, Mrs. Inez Wilson Dixon, 88, wife of late Professor A. A. Dixon of N. C. State University in Raleigh.

*Stone:* Source unknown but supposedly from deer, in excellent condition, almost round but slightly egg-shaped, about 3





*Wilson Madstones  
(37) and (38)*



*Owners: T. C. Dixon,  
Inez Wilson Dixon*

inches long by 2 inches wide by  $\frac{5}{8}$  inch deep, somewhat flat, smooth and polished, dark-brown and ruddy, looks porous, to be cleansed in fresh milk or warm water.

*Cures:* None on record.

*Comments:* "Dr. Wilson, a physician, never recommended the use of madstones, and my mother agreed with his views." "No folks came to the Wilson home for treatments by the madstone."

*Source:* Interview, May 14, 1975, Mrs. Inez (A. A.) Dixon, 16 Dixie Trail, Raleigh.

### 38. WILSON MADSTONE (2)

*Owner:* T. C. Dixon, 533 Rose Lane, Raleigh, received in 1973 this madstone from Mrs. Inez Wilson Dixon, who had inherited this stone and a larger one from her father, Dr. Joseph E. Wilson.

*Stone:* Almost round,  $1\frac{1}{2}$  inches in diameter by  $\frac{7}{8}$  inch in depth, somewhat flat on top and bottom, sloping to outer rim, light- to dark-tan.

*Comment:* None.

*Source:* Interview, June 30, 1975, T. C. Dixon.

### 39. HEATH MADSTONE

*Owner:* Mrs. John Heath, 65, formerly Prudence Paris, near Harmony, N. C., inherited stone from sister, Elizabeth Paris, who had her ownership notarized in 1885.

*Stone:* According to sworn statement by Elizabeth Paris,



stone from bladder of a deer in Virginia some seventy years ago, 1 inch long by  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch wide by  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch thick, light tan, similar to river rock; interior, where scraped away, softer and less dense; smooth with curving hard surface, and spongy material inside.

*Cures:* Mrs. Heath stated that Mrs. Martha Stark of north Iredell County cured after bitten by rattlesnake; a little Greenwood boy came in 1870s from Booneville, Yadkin County, to Harmony after being bitten by a mad dog, and later he vowed his life was saved by the stone.

*Comments:* In her notarized statement in December, 1885, Elizabeth Paris noted: "The affiant further states that she is creditably informed that the mad stone she possesses is identical with the celebrated 'Pointer Stone' . . . . The source from which the Pointer Stone was secured was identical and its effects the same upon poisonous stings and bites. . . ." The writer of the article, a believer in the Pasteur treatments, is very skeptical about the efficacy of such stones as illustrated by the quack cures reported in Tennessee and North Carolina.

*Sources:* G. Wright Lankford, "Madstone Legend One of the Most Interesting Folk-Lore Traditions," *Greensboro Daily News*, September 27, 1925; also Lankford, "Old Madstone in Iredell Still Held Sacred as Cure," *Winston-Salem Journal*, September 27, 1925. By courtesy of F. Roy Johnson, Murfreesboro. Note: Compare with Pointer Stone (1) and Madstones of Iredell County (46).

#### 40. URQUHART MADSTONE

*Owner:* Boyd Urquhart, living in the 1920s about thirty miles from Smithfield, Johnston County.

*Stone:* No description.

*Cure:* Negro boy, bitten by mad dog, as related to Paul Green by Lewis Guster's grandfather, old Dawson Deal, who borrowed stone from Urquhart, gave \$1,000 bond for its safety, and paid \$50 as fee for curing boy.

*Comments by Paul Green:* The late Bishop Joseph Blount Cheshire,\* of the Episcopal Diocese of N. C., told him successful cures with madstone had occurred in Sampson County, the stones sucking out the poison and then being cleansed in a bowl of milk, which turned sickish green. Green's view: "For years I have tried to find one of these ancient stones. They all seem to have disappeared leaving no trace—except the wonderful lies told about them."

*Source:* Paul Green, "Words and Ways", *North Carolina Folk-*



*lore Journal*, December 1968, p. 107. \*See Pointer Madstone (1) and Lockett Madstone (2).

#### 41. WILLIAMSON MADSTONE

*Owners:* J. A. Williamson, 80-year-old barber, 268 Sulphur Springs Road, Asheville; stone handed down to three generations from Grandfather W. R. Williamson, Milledgeville, Ga.

*Stone:* Supposedly from stomach of deer, a "petrified bud," slightly oval in shape, with flat ends and two flat sides, light brown and ivory in part, absorbent, cleansed in warm milk, and applied to wound after incision to cause bleeding two or three inches above wound.

*Cures:* None cited, except reference to Sir Walter Scott's *The Talisman* in which there is a prefatory explanation of madstone: Best known madstone in the U.S.A. owned by family named Fred in Virginia, brought from Scotland and may be one mentioned by Scott.\* "It is reported to have been successful in 130 cases."

*Comments:* "Williams makes no claims for 'Big Stone.' " He looked upon the stone as an interesting item in a collection of curious articles. He felt that its use may parallel the uses of the bezoar in Europe.

*Source:* " 'Mad Stone' Handed Down for Three Generations," *Asheville Citizen-Times*, August 29, 1954. (Note: Same newspaper on September 5, 1954, offers statements of general nature of stones used in Europe and Far East.)\* *The News and Observer* (Raleigh), February 2, 1972, p. 4, makes reference to the possible connection with *The Talisman*. Among other comments on general use of madstones, it includes the account about President Lincoln's having his son Robert treated by a madstone. No supporting evidence given.

#### 42. ELIOT MADSTONE

*Owners:* Great-grandfather Eliot, of McDowell County, transmitted stone to his son, the grandfather of the present owner, W. R. Buchanan, Rt. 1, Highway 50, Creedmoor Road, Raleigh.

*Stone:* May be a gallstone from the maw of a doe, 1½ inch long by 1 inch wide by ½ inch or less thick, egg-shaped and sloping to sides and around ends, solid and polished, brown with browner spots, to be soaked in warm liquid and applied more than once if necessary.

*Cures:* Used in curing mad-dog bites, but none listed.

*Comments:* Buchanan, who is skeptical about the efficacy



of the stone, says: "My neighbors think stone is no good."

*Source:* Telephone interview, April 25, 1975, W. R. Buchanan.

#### 43. "MR. F." MADSTONE

*Owner:* An old man called a "Mr. F.," who lived near Chapel Hill in the 1930s.

*Stone:* Absorbent and sticking to wounds.

*Cure(?):* The small daughter of one of the janitors at the University of North Carolina was bitten by an animal and was suffering very much. She was taken to "Mr. F."—"The old man gathered herbs and made a tea with which he dosed the child." As child became worse, the janitor suggested that the madstone be applied. It did not relieve the child; so she was sent to the office of Dr. Hayes in Hillsboro, where the doctor "soundly scolded the father about the 'mad-stone.' "

*Source:* Roy M. Brown, "The Treatment of Snake-Bite in Chapel Hill in the 1930s," *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, July, 1956, p. 1.

#### 44. FURGURSON MADSTONE

*Owner:* George Furgurson, who found stone in May, 1975, while rummaging through his late mother's jewelry box. His cousin, Mrs. Flonnie Dickens, formerly of Chatham County, and now of Raleigh, states that her Grandfather Thomas Mims purchased this mad rock from a traveling salesman eighty-five to ninety years ago.

*Stone:* Not described.

*Cures:* Tale about Harold Dickens (see below).

*Comments:* About this stone Mrs. Dickens states: "We children laughed at it and said it looked like a pebble out of the creek. The salesman had to cross a creek before he got to the house—and there were lots of pretty stones in the creek!" "Mrs. Flonnie did recount the tale of her brother Harold's wasp bite. Her parents wet the rock and put it on the wound where it stuck for about 10 minutes. The rock turned the water green all right, but the green stuff wasn't poison—just scum off the rock." "No, I don't believe in it," Mrs. Dickens added plainly. "But my grandfather did."

*Source:* Margaret Boothe, "Madstones Revisited," *Daily Times-News* (Burlington), May 25, 1975.

#### 45. LUNSFORD MADSTONE

*Owners:* Lunsford families of Surl community of eastern Per-



son County, stone probably bought from Indian for \$1 in Richmond, Va.; in 1930s the custodian was Murat Lunsford, whose widow, Mrs. Lucy Lunsford, is reported still living, as well as son, Garland Lunsford, Highway 158, near Surl Church, Roxboro.

*Stone:* Resembling piece of black slate, 1½ inches long by 1 inch wide by ¼ inch thick, absorbent, cleansed in warm water that shows no discoloration.

*Cure(?):* In early 1930s the informants's greataunt was bitten by a copperhead; a neighbor made a five-mile trip to Lunsford home to borrow the stone, and returned with it; stone was cleansed and applied to the wound for fifteen minutes and then fell off; then cleansed and reapplied for an hour. Greataunt suffered some headaches and nausea, but was up and around in two days.

*Comments:* "When the neighbor returned with madstone, I carefully watched the proceedings." "Even as a young lad I did not give much credit to the powers of the madstone." "I suspect that my aunt did not get a sufficient dose of the venom to cause severe problems, and that she would have recovered in exactly the same manner had not the madstone been applied." "The stone was undoubtedly a porous one, perhaps having minute cavities in the face of the stone that acted in about the same way as suction cups when placed against the skin. By placing the stone in warm water before applying, the cavities perhaps expanded—thus increasing the size of the 'suction cups.' As the stone cooled, the cups would lose their pressure and then drop off."

*Source:* Letter, May 7, 1975, to me from Dwight L. Gentry, Professor and Director of Graduate Program in Business, University of N. C. at Greensboro.

#### 46. MADSTONES OF IREDELL COUNTY

*Owners:* *Clanton* stone (better known stone), owned by William Clanton, near King's Mill, Sharpesburg community, in 1880s; *Paris* stone, owned by unnamed person, Eagle Mills township, in 1880s; *Hambright* stone, owned by G. W. Hambright, Poison Springs, in 1886, and handed down by his grandmother in Stanly County some fifty years earlier; *Weedon* stone, owned by member of Weedon family, Newton, in 1887; *Lewis* stone, owned by Postmaster Lewis, Statesville, about 1887; *Kestler* stone, owned by C. W. Kestler, Cool Springs, in 1895; *Edwards* stone, owned by W. W. Weedon, Elmwood, in 1911; *Lee Clanton*



stone, owned by Lee Clanton, Sharpesburg, in 1911.

*Stones:* Supposedly from stomachs of deer, probably gallstones, “. . . supposed to have curative effects when applied to insect stings or dog bites—even the bites of a mad dog.”

*Cures(?):* In 1886 the daughter of Rebecca Pope, Nannie Pope, bitten by mad dog on arm and thigh and taken to Clanton stone in Sharpesburg; soon thereafter daughter taken to Paris stone in Eagle Mills for check on application of Clanton stone. In 1887 George Gay (colored), of Chambersburg township, bitten by “Hucks mule” and hydrophobia developing, taken to Weedon stone in Newton; cure uncertain but patient relieved mentally. In 1887 James Page took son, supposedly bitten by a cat, to Lewis stone in Statesville; same cat had fits and had to be killed. In 1895 Kestler stone left at office of *Statesville Record & Landmark* and there used by several bitten persons, including the following: W. Y. Hair, supposedly bitten by mad dog, and “to be sure,” after treatment in Statesville, taken to Charlotte for application of another stone; T. J. McConnel, of Mt. Ulla, brought his daughter to the Kestler stone; and J. W. Bolick took his three-year-old daughter, supposedly bitten by a mad dog, to Kestler stone. In 1897 a girl, supposedly bitten by Mrs. Murphy’s mad dogs, taken to a madstone. In 1899 T. J. Cook, bitten by dog and taken to Kestler’s stone in Cool Springs, where “The stone stuck five or six times, once for about two minutes. Mr. Cook brought the madstone home with him and has tried it since without results.” In 1911 Q. D. Freeze, bitten by a dog, taken for treatment by Edwards stone, then owned by W. W. Weedon, Elmwood. In 1912 a Mr. Smith, of Sharpesburg, came for treatment by the Lee Clanton stone, which stuck seven times.

*Comments:* After 1909 “it was usually the Pasteur treatment [initiated in 1885] rather than the madstone, but not entirely.” The *Statesville Record & Landmark*, in reference to Kestler’s stone being left at its office stated: “The Landmark noted it had been used several times and had ‘always relieved—the patient’s mind at least.’ ” “Somewhere some of these madstones must be tucked away in a trunk or lying around looking like any other rock. It is not likely they could today compete with the Pasteur treatment for rabies, but they would make a good museum piece to remind us of what used to be.”

*Source:* Homer Keever, “Any Madstones Left in Iredell?” *Statesville Record & Landmark*, February 10, 1972.



## GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

Excluding any and all questionable averages, some general observations about the pros and cons in the foregoing digests may prove helpful to the reader, be he buff or scholar. Although the history of every madstone must be respected on its own merits, a few of the madstones such as the Pointer, Lockett, Gray, and Roney (1-4), as well as the Yelton (17) and the Sparrow (18), embrace a number of recollections about other stones in the list. They offer an extensive range of assertions—concerning ownership, qualities of the stones, reported cures, and supporting comments. And, like the digests that follow, they prepare for the inevitable opposition, the doubts and skepticism of a more scientific era that arose after the advent of the antitoxin developed by Pasteur in 1885.

## THE INFORMANTS

The best of the informants have been the surviving members of families that treasured the madstones. They have expressed varied beliefs and recollections about their stones in letters, telephone calls, interviews, news releases, and lengthy feature accounts in magazines and especially newspapers in North Carolina. Patients, their relatives, and other witnesses have sometimes been very specific in their evidence about the cures effected.

Older persons, including a number of clear-headed women, sixty years old or older and coming from largely rural backgrounds, have been frank, enthusiastic, uninhibited, and responsible in their comments. Though only a few have hesitated to voice their opinions about their own madstones for fear of being considered “kooks” by their neighbors, one intelligent and educated family, in possession of a beautiful and significant madstone, requested that their stone not be publicized for this reason, and a physician, who has a prized heirloom, apparently does not want his stone brought to public attention. In spite of due respect for their wishes, their stones might reflect some valuable light in this survey.

## OWNERSHIP

Though a number of the original owners of madstones never disclosed how they got their stones, some of them without apology did reveal that strangers, travellers from India, Germany, or Virginia, old Negro women in the South, several old Indians from Richmond, Virginia, and other parts either sold or gave stones to





*Joseph D. Clark surrounded by madstone owners and enthusiasts at his Raleigh home on July 13, 1975. Madstones displayed on table. Photo courtesy of News and Observer, Raleigh.*



them. In Richmond, Indians dispensed them at a dollar a piece; Indians exchanged them for a night's food and lodging or for a pint of whisky; an Indian woman in 1815 sold her stone to Henry Bundy (6); an Indian peddler let Theophilus Spach have his stone (9); a stranger sold his stone to Cornelia Roney (4) for \$2.50; a traveller in 1905 sold his stone for \$7.50 to Mr. Buffaloe (22); another strange man in 1884 paid Mr. Apple \$200 for his stone that had cured Mr. Apple's two sons (10); and occasionally the owners bought stones that were advertized in the newspapers. The estimated values of stones might be \$1000 when bonded for safety (1).

An occasional vendor of these stones resorted to high-powered salesmanship. Before the prospective buyer, he would demonstrate the magic virtues of a stone by causing a mysterious snake to bite his own hand and then apply the stone to the wound to which it stuck fast for awhile and then fell off. Then to make the demonstration sure-fire, he would apply the stone to a rabid cat (1). The deal was on.

Once a madstone was received by an original owner, it became a prized family possession, to be kept unencumbered and transmitted with pride to his heirs. If an outsider had part interest in a stone, such as George W. Barnett, who held a one-fourth ownership of the Pointer stone, he might sell it to the family heirs (1). But Joe Ragans would not trade his half interest for a five-year-old horse belonging to John Oakley (15). In the sale of the Dixon estate, Dixon's madstone was bought for \$2.50 as a curiosity (5).

On the other hand, ownership might become corporate, as in the joint control of a stone by H. A. Nading and a Mrs. Beard (14); or it might be an instrument of a district such as the Farmers' Madstone (23), owned by twenty farmers on Knotts Island, Currituck County. These owners stated that their stone "is considered more valuable than diamonds." In this respect it served a general locality as did the Neal madstone (8) during the 1880s in four counties: Forsyth, Guilford, Stokes, and Rockingham—an area not so extensive as that served by the Pointer stone in Person and Granville counties and far beyond them.

The proud owners of these madstones, either the husband or wife, usually applied the stones to wounds at their own homes, at a cost of \$15 to \$25 for each treatment (3) or at \$100 (later reduced to \$20) for the application of the Pointer stone (1). If the patients had to stay for an extended time, they would be



charged a reasonable sum for room and board. In most cases, however, patients were charged a small fee or nothing for a short visit. Sometimes the owners would lend their stones for use in another community, provided that a bond was given for their safe return. All in all, owners were distinctly generous in aiding their neighbors who were in trouble.

## THE MADSTONES

In some instances, the informants have stated that the geographical sources of their stones have been India, Germany, and so on. They have stressed particularly that they came from the stomachs of ruminants as well as from the livers or bladders of these animals. Apple (10) got his stone, however, from a nonruminant. Not having time to go to the Pointer madstone, he killed forthwith a horse to get his own madstone. Charles W. Proffit (34) found his stone in a feed trough where it had been regurgitated by a cow. In 1890 Joe Regans (15) discovered his stone in a field where he was plowing, probably as did others on their farms or in creek or river beds.

These madstones, both as wholes and fragments, show a wide range in characteristics—in size, from  $\frac{1}{4}$  to 3 inches long by 1 to 2 inches wide by  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch deep; in weight, from a few ounces to  $\frac{1}{2}$  pound or more; in shape, rectangular or triangular, sometimes nearly oval or round, flat on top and bottom or sloping from center to the edges, almond-shaped or like a kidney bean or a river rock; in color, gray, black or ebony, light mahogany, slate-colored, brown, dark-brown, pinkish, reddish, ruddy, yellow-streaked, whitish, ivory, crystalline, and tan; in texture, smooth and a bit velvety, hard or spongy, with absorbing quality. For thorough cleansing, stones were to be soaked and washed in warm water or fresh milk, sometimes with bread crumbs. Boiling water or hot ashes had to be avoided, since they cracked the stones.

## THE CURES

The foregoing information raises several unanswered questions, but there are a number of others about the cures reported. The crux of the matter, between proponents and opponents of madstones, is the efficacy or lack of it in preventing hydrophobia, generally called rabies.

The family owners of these stones, reliable persons who often applied them to wounds, have vowed that the stones *did* suck out the venom of mad animals, etc., from the affected parts of their



patients. Their assertions have been amply corroborated by their trusting and cured patients (some specifically named), other witnesses, and in a few instances by well-known physicians. They have cited a small number of deaths because the patients did not allow sufficient time for the stones to take effect or failed to hurry to a madstone soon after a fatal attack by an animal (3,22). They have also cited several examples of persons and animals being bitten by the same mad animal: the persons treated by the madstone were healed, but the untreated animals died (1,23). The following excerpts from the digests represent numerous persons who believed in madstones and their effectiveness.

The late Kate Pointer stated: "My father love it [the stone] better than he did his children . . . no diamond could have been guarded more closely" (1). In her article in 1972 about the Gray madstone Doris Duncan wrote: "To those who have been cured by it or have seen it work on their loved ones, there is no doubt about its efficacy" (3). Mrs. Allie G. Mundy in her report about the Brooks madstone declared: "I know that stone did its work because my daddy never went to a doctor and he was CURED" (19). In 1975 A. F. Neal while discussing his stone stated: "People would come and stay at their home for days, and they never lost a case" (8). In his comments about the Williams madstones, Jack H. Wood poured out his feelings: "Seventy-five cases of snake and other bites were cured; no application of the stones failed to cure the victims." Incidentally, Wood himself was cured of a snake bite (26). With reference to the Furgurson madstone, Mrs. Flonnie Dickens spoke her own emphatic modern position: "No, I don't believe in it. But my grandfather did" (44).

The last statement, recently expressed, indicates an evolution in the treatment of rabies, which started in North Carolina about 1915 when the doctors used Pasteur's antitoxin more and more in the prevention of rabies. This acceleration has continued without abatement into this decade. In the cited digests, the decline is evident, with one use of the madstone in 1939 (18), another in 1950 (3), and the latest in 1958 (29). In view of this trend, it seems logical to focus attention upon the part played by the medical profession.

The physicians, a rather practical and skeptical lot here in North Carolina and elsewhere, have shown a bare minimum of enthusiasm in treating wounds, made by mad animals, by applying madstones to them. Nowadays few doctors ever mention the use of them; and apparently, from their remarks, many of them



know nothing about this kind of folk medicine that was once so popular.

The evidence uncovered by this survey shows that a few doctors not only were interested in owning such stones but also in using them. In 1875 a British physician presented a madstone, with specific directions in applying it, to the Reverend W. P. Gray, a Methodist minister, whose descendants made it one of the most popular stones in the State (3). And some of them, for unknown reasons, were in the market to buy them, such as Dr. George Stover, who attempted to purchase the Joe Ragans stone, but was refused. Later another physician of Roxboro tried to buy the same stone, and he failed (15). Dr. Joseph E. Wilson of Canton managed to get two beautiful stones from some unspecified source, but he never used either one of them (37-38). However, in 1894 Dr. William Thorp advised the use of the Lockett stone (2). In the next year a Dr. Good and three doctors from Charlotte agreed that the Yelton stone (17) should be applied to a patient. Dr. B. B. Lloyd of Chapel Hill sent several of his patients to the madstone owned by F. H. Sparrow, a local resident (18). An unnamed doctor was present when the Butler madstone was applied to William Littles, who declared that the stone saved his life (12). And Dr. Beasley sold his madstone to Fred Sparrow for \$20 (18).

One of the exuberant advocates of madstones, Mrs. John M. Baker, of Haw River, made this recent statement: "The late Dr. J. C. Wilkins told me that several persons were treated after being bitten by dogs that were really mad, and that not one of them developed rabies. He said it looked like there must be some virtue in the stone, but he preferred the rabies shots (4). In Hillsboro, Dr. Hayes scolded a janitor who tried to have his young daughter cured by a madstone in Chapel Hill and, after his failure, brought her to him for more scientific treatment (43). Mrs. Mollie Gray stated the conflict between the physicians and cured patients very well: "The most of them [the doctors] think it is a fake, but I know it works because I have seen it" (3).

The doubts of the physicians such as Dr. Joseph E. Wilson and others have also been registered by laymen. For instance, J. A. Williamson, an eighty-year-old barber of Asheville, in 1954 would make no claims about his "Big Stone". "He thinks and quite properly that it is an interesting item for a collection of curious articles" (41). Paul Green, well-known folklorist and playwright, said: "For years I have tried to find one of these ancient stones. They all seem to have disappeared leaving no trace—except the



wonderful lies told about them" (40). Dr. Dwight L. Gentry, Professor and Director of the Graduate Program in Business, University of N. C. at Greensboro, recently expressed his views about the treatment of his greataunt by the borrowed Lunsford madstone: "When the neighbor returned with the madstone, I carefully watched the proceedings. . . . Even as a young lad I did not give much credit to the powers of the madstone. . . . I suspect that my aunt did not get a sufficient dose of the venom to cause severe problems, and that she would have recovered in exactly the same manner had not the madstone been applied" (45). Another skeptic about the efficacy of these stones is Homer Kever of Statesville. In his article "Any Madstones Left in Iredell?" he has traced the reported cures in his native county from the 1880s onward, but has not found evidence to confirm the reputed cures by madstones. In his own charitable and genteel manner, he does not throw darts at those who swear by the healing power of such stones. Near the end of his well-documented account, he states: "It is not likely they would compete with the Pasteur treatment for rabies, but they would make a good museum piece to remind us of what used to be" (46).

In view of the decline in the use of madstones, now in a comatose state, would a bitten patient in these times go first to a madstone and then hustle off for a Pasteur remedy as did John Moss and his three brothers in 1914? (36). Influenced by the respected beliefs and experiences of his forebears, would he frenziedly race to the doctor's office only?

### SOME QUESTION MARKS

1. Conceding that the informants about madstones did not state the whole truth in their recollections, is there any evidence to prove that they did not see what they sincerely said they saw or experienced? To them, seeing is not only believing but also reality.

2. Do madstones—all of them unique—come from animals, or plants, or the soil? Although geologists and other scientists can explain their composition, the informants may retort: Suppose they can? In spite of geologists, madstones do exist and they do work!

3. Are all biting dogs, snakes, spiders, etc., really mad? According to some estimates, about eight out of every ten of them are not rabid at all. If so, then two or more of them must be venomous. The informants, who vow that all of them would cause hydro-



phobia, snort: Which two? So far nobody has come up with a correct figure.

4. Have the bitten patients been cured? Physically, yes and no, depending upon the number of mad animals. How? A miracle? A faith cure? On the other hand, psychologically, yes and yes and yes. Their unquestioning faith in madstones and their manipulators has lifted the burden from their minds. Their anxieties, their fear of death and other calamities, have been allayed. Good family doctors, trusted by their confiding patients, have observed hundreds of similar cures.

5. Should known existing madstones be assembled in museums along with outmoded instruments used by physicians and surgeons a century ago? But can you persuade their owners to release them? They hold onto them! They hug them for dear life!

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The Legend of the Bell Witch, <i>Kathy Johnson</i> . . . . .	43
The Stallion's Braided Mane, <i>Joanna Godwin</i> . . . . .	49
The Vampire Beast of Bladenboro, <i>Joseph F. Gallehugh, Jr.</i> . . . . .	53
Witches of Iredell County, <i>Connie Stone</i> . . . . .	59
Folklore Sampler. . . . .	64
Citations . . . . .	71

---

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## From the Editor's Desk

This special **STUDENT ISSUE** has been made possible by a generous grant from the North Carolina Arts Council. In recent years the Arts Council has provided financial assistance for projects such as this. The editor, the membership of the Society, and our subscribers are grateful for aid rendered.

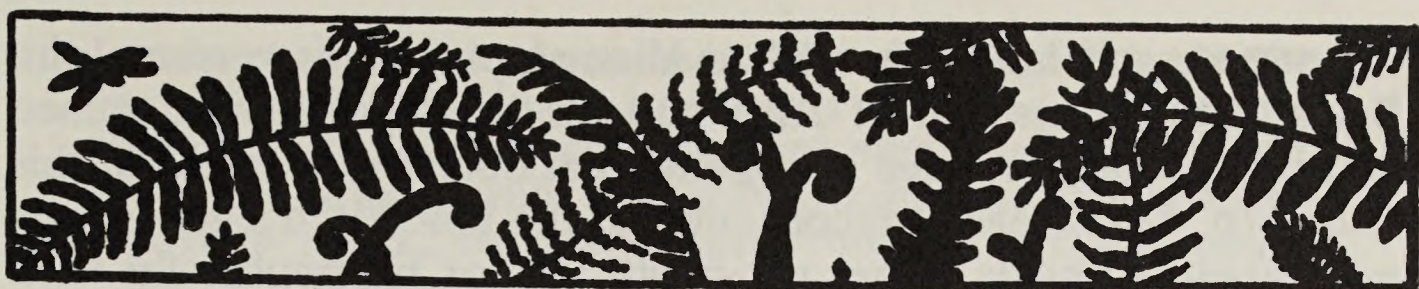
**DR. LENA MAYBERRY**, the dynamic president of the Society, has already completed plans for upcoming Culture Week activities. The program for December 3, 1976, promises to be an exciting one: Cratis Williams discussing Appalachian speech, Clark Jones performing on the fretless banjo and hammer dulcimer, and Jimmy Mayberry demonstrating the styles, history, and performance of the dulcimer. Details will follow in the next issue.

Our **MADSTONES** issue by Dr. Joseph Clark has received very favorable attention. Already some half dozen unrecorded madstones have appeared in response to the monograph. We hope that in some future issue Dr. Clark can present a discussion of these additions.

This year the *Journal* is operating without fulltime secretarial assistance. If we have been remiss in any correspondence, we trust that you will be patient in our dilemma.

*Lemuel Butler*





## FIRST PRIZE

### THE LEGEND OF THE BELL WITCH

by Kathy McH. Johnson

As a secondary-school English teacher, I have at my disposal a wealth of folklore informants. Through one of these informants, who was enticed by the promise of extra credit, I became acquainted with one of the most intriguing legendary characters in American folklore. This young man assured me that his father, David Peach, who is the minister of the First Baptist Church in Butner, N.C., knew "a whole bunch of ghost stories." At my urging, these "ghost stories" were taped. The resulting recording, made in March of 1976, revealed a collection of legends revolving around the famous Bell Witch of Middle Tennessee.

David Peach was reared in East Tennessee, and consequently he heard stories about the Bell Witch throughout his boyhood. He recalled that the Bell Witch stories were inconsistent and numerous. He is right on both accounts. One published article entitled "Demonic Visits of the Bell Witch" (*North Carolina Folklore Journal*, May, 1975) by Harry A. Hargrave states that the John Bell family, who were the victims of the Bell Witch, originated in North Carolina and later moved to Middle Tennessee. The Bell biographical data that Hargrave relates in his article states that John and Lucy Bell had six children, the youngest of whom was named Betsy (p. 47). Another published account of the Bell Witch in B.A. Botkin's *A Treasury of American Folklore* (1944) states that the Bell family originated in North Carolina, moved to

† The author wrote this paper during a course in folklore taught by Leonidas Betts at N.C. State University in Raleigh.



Tennessee, and later migrated to Mississippi. In this version John Bell's family consisted of John and his wife, a daughter named Mary, and "two or three young-uns that don't figure much in this story" (p. 697). Peach's recollection of the Bell Witch legends does not totally coincide either geographically or biographically with either of these accounts; however, the stories that he remembers from his childhood and the ones he became acquainted with as an adult recount some of the more interesting and genuinely unusual witch legends that I have ever heard.

The Bell Witch legend, as Peach recalls it, began this way:

It seems as though John Bell, a native of Tennessee, was a farmer with a rather large farm just out of Nashville, Tennessee. But he was more than just a farmer, for it was on this man's farm that the story of the Bell Witch began. Now there was a John Bell who was a prominent Tennessee politician in the nineteenth century—a man who actually ran for president in 1860, the year that Abraham Lincoln was elected. He was not very popular, for he ran fourth in a field of four. But [he was] a man who was a friend of Andrew Jackson. This would lead some to believe that the John Bell who was a politician and the John Bell, the farmer, were the same person.

According to the *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1972, 3:507, there was a Tennessee politician by the name of John Bell who ran against Abraham Lincoln in 1860. There is, however, nothing in this encyclopedia entry to indicate that the politician John Bell and the farmer John Bell were the same man.

John Bell married a young woman from a well-to-do Nashville family. John was a well educated man. He had a degree from the University of Nashville and a law degree, and had, at some time, practiced law. But he took his new wife to the farm. There, in due time, she was to give birth to their first child. Some time before the child was to be born, a strange animal appeared on the farm—an animal somewhat larger than a dog, somewhat smaller than a bear, that appeared to be like no animal anyone had seen. The animal was first seen in the fields, and then as the time for the birth of the child came, the animal appeared more often and closer and closer to the house. Strange sounds were heard throughout the night. Whenever an attempt was made to approach the animal, it would seem to disappear.

Then Mary Bell was born. Immediately upon her birth, strange things began to happen in the home of John Bell. As Mary began to grow, she began to relate



strange events to her parents. It seems as though she would wake up during the night feeling a cold breeze blowing across her face. Then one night she awoke to see a figure in the corner of her bedroom. The figure didn't move or speak, but Mary arose from her bed, and as she did, the figure disappeared. This happened on several occasions—Mary awakening, arising from her bed, and the figure disappearing. As she became a bit older and perhaps accustomed to this scene, from time to time during the night she was aroused and shaken, sometimes even thrown from her bed only to awaken to find no cause. Then one night after she was thrown from her bed, as she arose from the floor, there stood the figure in the corner of the bedroom. The figure was calling her name: "Mary, Mary, you are my Mary." Mary ran from the room, ran to her mother, and told of this strange event. It happened again and again, and the tales of the Bell Witch began to reach the neighbors with various reactions of disbelief.

Although Peach's account of the origin of Bell Witch never directly states that the witch is connected with Mary Bell, the implication is there. Many of the legends that Peach related place the witch in control of Mary and her actions. It should be noted, however, that the Bell Witch did persecute other family members, and on occasion, outsiders. This particular tale will substantiate the Bell Witch's persecution of someone besides Mary.

It seems as though John Bell was having difficulty on his farm. His crops would not succeed even though the crops of his neighbors did. His buildings would collapse without any seeming cause. His business ventures would not succeed for him. There were many failures, many disappointments. One day Andrew Jackson, who lived on a nearby farm, decided to go to the farm of his neighbor and to talk to him about these events. As Mr. Jackson approached the Bell farm, he turned into the driveway, passing a large hickory tree. As he reached the tree, it seemed as though the wheels of his wagon were frozen to the trail. As he sat there trying to get his horse to move, something swooped down from the tree and struck his hat from his head. Right there Andrew Jackson decided this was no place for him. He managed to turn his wagon around and to immediately leave, never to return again.

The Bell Witch occasionally turned her attention to persons other than Mary, but it seems that her purpose in coming to the Bell farm was, in some way, directly related to Mary Bell. The Bell Witch prevented Mary from ever marrying, and the following story seems to indicate that the Bell Witch was either directly or



indirectly related to Mary's death. It is also interesting to note that after Mary's death the strange occurrences seemingly linked to the Bell Witch ceased.

Mary Bell matured into a beautiful young lady. She was attractive to many of the neighborhood young men. Many of them came to court Mary, but none of them seemed to stay very long or after one or two or three visits to return. It seems as though strange things would happen to them. They would come to the porch approaching the door to knock on the door, when all of a sudden their hats would be knocked from their heads, or perhaps the flowers or gifts they were bringing to Mary would be snatched away from them. They sought to find the cause, but never was there anyone else around or anything that could cause these events.

One man became more persistent than the others. Even though these things took place with him, he decided not to be frightened away. He came again and again to see Mary, each time with something taking place to detract him from his purpose. But he was persistent; in fact, he courted her to the point where he was willing to ask her for her hand in marriage. One evening they sat there on the porch, this young man at Mary's feet ready to propose. But as he prepared himself, the words would not come from his throat. His face became flushed, and he felt as though a great blast of heat had come down over his body. He couldn't move, he couldn't speak, and Mary sat there and looked at him. Soon he gained enough strength to rise to his feet. He took his hat, placed it on his head, turned around, and left, never to return to see Mary Bell.

Several years passed. Mary Bell, being the picture of health, but yet unable to keep a suitor. The strange events of the Bell farm continued day after day, month after month, and year after year until one day Mary became ill. She began to stay in the bed much more. She would go to bed early and get up late until eventually she wouldn't leave the bed at all. The Bells called for a doctor to come to see her, and he could find no reason why she was acting as she was. He decided that he could do nothing for her, but Mary became sicker and sicker. Within a few weeks, Mary was dead. After this, the strange events that had been going on for years ended. The story is told that some of the servants there on the farm had heard a voice say at the burial of Mary Bell, "I'll be back. I'll be back."

The Bell Witch seemed to indicate, according to Peach, that she would return. Hargrave states in his article that the demon



left after the death of John Bell in 1828. The witch stated it would return to the Bell family in 111 years or in 1935. Dr. Charles Bailey Bell, the grandson of John Bell, published *The Bell Witch* in anticipation of the witch's return; however, he never made any public announcement to the effect that the witch did return (Hargrave, p. 54). The following tale supplied by Peach suggests that the Bell Witch did make a reappearance, but not specifically to the Bell family. It is significant to note that the witch's supposed reappearance was in Nashville, Tennessee, which is where Dr. Charles Bailey Bell resided (Hargrave, p. 54).

Many years after her [Mary Bell's] death a strange event took place in the city of Nashville. Each day for a week a small woman dressed in black rode on a certain trolley in the late evening to the very end of the line. Each day the conductor of the trolley noticed the woman, and he noticed that she got off on the very last stop before the trolley turned around and went back into the downtown part of Nashville. Each day as she got off the trolley and walked down the road, she seemed to almost disappear. This particular trolley ran to the edge of the city, not too far from the cemetery where Mary Bell was buried. The conductor had his curiosity aroused by these daily visits by this woman, and so on the seventh day he decided to watch and see where she went. She got off the trolley, she walked in the direction of the cemetery, and even as the conductor watched her, she disappeared. Now there's nothing else to say that this was the Bell Witch returned, but with the legend of the Bell Witch persisting, it was thought that this was the first return of the Bell Witch.

There is one additional incident described by Peach that is worth noting. He stated that most of his boyhood memories concerning the Bell Witch had faded until he moved to Middle Tennessee after he became a minister. There he met the Bryan family, and it seems that probably the strangest story that Peach knew connected with the Bell Witch involved this family.

Mr. Bryan had a strange side to his life. He had a great interest in the stories of the Bell Witch, an interest that had stimulated his youngest son to investigate the stories of the Bell Witch. The son was a prominent musician known on a national scale for his talent and ability. This son had decided that he would take the stories of the Bell Witch and make a musical, possibly for Broadway production. He went to work and he completed his work. But then came into play one of the



stranger stories about the Bell Witch. For it had long been said that anyone who attempted to investigate or write in any way the stories of the Bell Witch was in danger of losing their lives. It seemed that within a week after the completion of this musical, James Bryan died of a heart attack at the age of forty-five. Old Mr. Bryan was somewhat reluctant to talk about this situation, but still I would elicit from him stories of the Bell Witch. This renewed my interest and revived my memory of the tales I had heard as a boy.

### Appendix

The following motifs, some of which can be found in Thompson's *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, were illustrated in the Bell Witch legends related on tape by David Peach in March of 1976:

1. The appearance of unusual beast prior to birth of child—G211.2—witch in form of wild beast.
2. Figure appearing and disappearing preceded by cold breeze.
3. Figure disturbing the sleeping Mary Bell.
4. John Bell's crops failing while surrounding farmer's succeed—G265.9—Witch ruins crop.
5. John Bell's buildings collapsing for no apparant reason—G265.8.5—Witch bewitches buildings.
6. Andrew Jackson's horse stopping abruptly in Bell's driveway—D2072.0.2—Horse unable to move wagon paralyzed by witch.
7. Something removing Andrew Jackson's hat from his head.
8. Hats and gifts of suitors being snatched from them.
9. Would-be husband's inability to propose.
10. Mary Bell's mysterious illness and subsequent death.
11. Voice of supposed Bell Witch promising to return.
12. Subsequent reappearance of woman assumed to be Bell Witch who rode trolley to cemetery where Mary Bell is buried.
13. Death to anyone who investigates Bell Witch or her stories—Q558—Mysterious death as punishment.







## SECOND PRIZE

### THE STALLION'S BRAIDED MANE

by Joanna Godwin

Nowadays good spook tales are hard to come by. Most of the ones I hear are second-hand and old as the hills. I have never seen a spook up close, myself; and it isn't likely I ever will. Spooks, for some ungodly reason, hang out in the country. (Maybe it's the air or something.) My father, being one generation removed from the farm, has a whole passel of tales he used to tell—before we got a television, that is. Of course, even those tales are second-hand from *his* father. He won't admit to ever trucking with any spooks. In fact, now that I'm on the over-the-hill side of childhood, he doesn't come out with the tales anymore. Besides, believing in spooks is not "cool" once one leaves the farm.

I did get him to talking one night, though. I remembered bits of some stories Grandpa told him, and I convinced him that we owed it to the old man, twenty-five years dead, to remember his stories properly. My mother was skeptical and pooh-poohed the tales now and then over her needle-point. We ignored her. I was interested in one particular story, and I wanted to know the details.

I had heard a lot of yarns involving animals, but none like this one. In rural communities when people depended on animals for power or food, it was natural that they would be preoccupied with anything affecting their livestock; therefore, a storehouse of such tales abounded. Living in isolated areas, people, often superstitious, formulated their own explanations for unusual occurrences.

† *The author (1615-G Merry Oaks Road, Charlotte 28205) wrote this paper while she was enrolled in a Creative Writing class at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.*



(For example, D2083.1 Cows magically made dry.) Being a city slicker, I'm not clear what the relationship was between farmer and animal that could have generated such lively tales. It seems that mere dependence on the animal is not enough explanation. Modern farmers are dependent on the tractor, but I cannot conceive of such a tale, as the one told by my grandfather, being told about a tractor—even if tractors had been common during the time when people were more superstitious.

My father, when I had finally persuaded him to relate the story, made it clear to me that he was just telling a tale that his father told, and that I could take it or not as the truth. Grandpa, though not known to lie, did have a penchant for Percy Flower's white lightning—which, it was commonly known, could knock your socks off. So, I cannot testify to the truth of the story; I can only relate the following tale, to the best of my recollection, as it was told to me by my father, who claims that his pa told it to him as the God's truth.

In 1928 my Grandpa, Leonard Godwin, a feisty young man of Irish descent, lived in Johnston County a few miles from Wendell east of Raleigh. Although he was only five-feet two-inches tall, he was almost as wide, and nobody in those parts crossed him. Being a farmer, he kept a big, strapping stallion, which he hitched up to plow the fields. This stallion was milk-white and had a long, flowing mane. Nobody else for miles around had a horse like that.

One morning, close to the autumn equinox, Leonard and his sons went out to the barn to hitch up the horse. He noticed that the barn door was slightly ajar, and he thought it strange, since he always made certain that the horse was fed and locked in at night. He scolded his sons, thinking they had been careless, but they assured him that neither of them had left the door open. He expected to find the stallion gone; however, what he did find was more extraordinary. The horse was standing in his stall, the gate latched, and he was dripping wet as if someone had ridden him into a lather.

The horse was so exhausted he could not be used for work that day. Leonard thought, though he did not say so, that one of his sons had sneaked out for a midnight ride. But still, there was something mysterious: he had found two perfect braids in the stallion's mane, which he had undone without mentioning. He knew that neither of his sons could tie a slip-knot, much less a braid. Nevertheless, whoever had ridden his stallion, he swore, would not ride him again. That night he secured the barn door by hooking a log chain from the latch to one of the rafters.

The next morning Leonard struck out for the barn, confident that his horse would be ready for the day's work. However, just as before, the barn door was ajar. Not believing his eyes, he



sprinted ahead and discovered that, once again, the stallion was standing in his stall dripping wet, with those two curious braids in his mane. Surely, if anyone was riding his horse at night, it was not his sons; the heavy log chain, which even he had difficulty lifting, lay outside the barn door in a neat coil.

Annoyed at losing two days' work with the horse, Leonard began to inquire in the neighborhood as to whether others had experienced such unauthorized use of their animals. None had, but one old codger claimed that he had heard of such tales when he was a boy. This old man was the sage of the community, and he practiced hoo-doo magic. Not only did this old gentleman know everything there was to know about the supernatural world, but he also performed such practical miracles as curing illnesses and healing warts. Cap'n, as he was called, said that, as sure as he was born, a witch was riding Leonard's horse at night.

Cap'n offered to use his talents to rid Leonard of this plaguing witch, but my grandpa was not about to truck with such hogwash. He decided that he would rid himself of whoever was riding his horse that same night. When the family had gone to bed, Leonard took his shotgun and struck out for the pine thicket beside the barn. The moon was full and he had a clear view of the barn door from the fallen log where he sat waiting. Several hours passed and nothing happened. He figured that word had gotten around the community that he meant to put a stop to the "horse borrowing" and that whoever had been guilty had decided that he didn't want to tangle with Leonard Godwin. But just before daybreak, when he had about decided to go back to the house and get some sleep, a strange thing happened.

Inside the barn, the stallion began to stomp and whinny. Leonard sat up and cocked his gun, but before he could stand up and take aim towards the barn door, he felt a cold, wet hand at the base of his neck. The sensation was brief, but it sent chills rippling up and down his spine. He was frozen. He couldn't even muster the courage to look behind him, and he had the uncanny feeling that a loaded gun would have no effect against the creature at his neck.

The rest of the night Leonard sat terrified in the pine thicket. Then, when the sun had fully risen, he went back to the house and told his family about his experience. Later that week, Cap'n got news of what had happened, and he came visiting. Leonard took him to the barn to show him the braids in the stallion's mane.

"Leonard," he said, "that was sure enough a witch. There ain't no doubt. But I must say you got more guts than I have. If I had o' give you every potion in the book, nothin' would o' got rid o' that witch quick as standin' up to her."

Leonard never would say whether he thought a witch had ridden his stallion or not, but he didn't quickly forget his terror in the pine thicket. He claimed that he wouldn't sit in that thicket at night again if the horse dropped dead with his *tail* in braids. Nevertheless, it was fortunate that he did keep that one vigil, for, after that night, he never again found his stallion ridden into a lather.

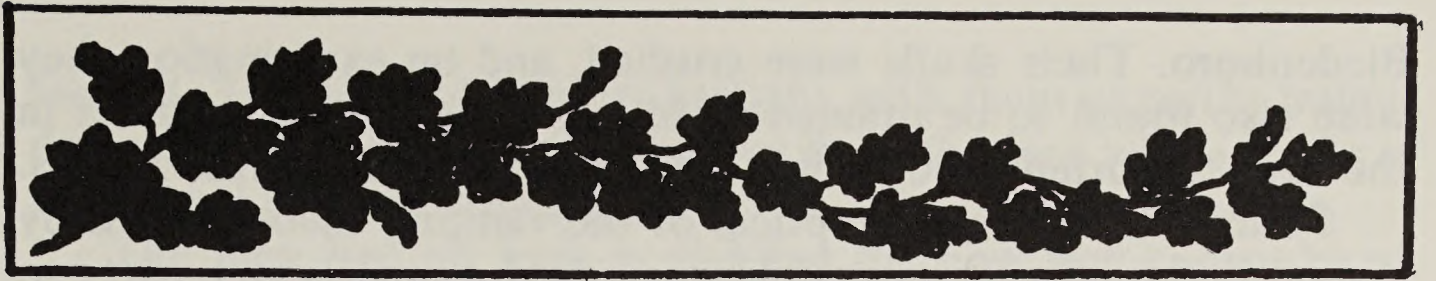


It seems that I am the first woman in my family who is not a total skeptic. My grandmother, when Grandpa related the tale, said he had probably fallen asleep and dreamed the whole thing. As for the horse, my mother says that the poor thing had probably been frightened by a rat and had run around the stall until he worked himself into a sweat. My father says that would not be possible because the stall was too small; and even if it were possible, it would have been *some* rat that could make braids.

What about braids? Cap'n said that witches always made two braids in a stallion's mane to use for reins, and that they favored white horses on which to gallop about at night doing their mischief. I'm not drawing any conclusions either way. I'm just telling a story that my father told me that his pa said was the God's truth. I'm not saying I believe in witches, and I'm not saying I don't; so, how the spooks take my attitude is up to them. I don't care. Besides, I don't have a horse, and I keep telling myself that spooks only hang out in the country.







## THE VAMPIRE BEAST OF BLADENBORO

by Joseph F. Gallehugh, Jr.

Not only did newspapers all over the southeastern United States cover the mysterious story, but United Press International and Associated Press carried it, and it was even mentioned in the *Saturday Evening Post*. To this day no one really knows exactly what it was that caused a near panic in the small mill town of Bladenboro. Whatever this “thing” was, it had extraordinary strength and sucked the blood from living animals.

The Vampire Beast of Bladenboro has since become a standing joke in North Carolina, but when this “thing” roamed the outskirts of that small mill town in Bladen County, even the bravest locked their doors at night and gave a sigh of relief when morning came.

On December 29, 1953, a “sleek, black,” catlike animal, “about five feet long with a round face” was sighted near Clarkton as it attacked and dragged a dog into thick underbrush. The victim was found later, mangled and drained of blood not far from where the mysterious catlike creature had been spotted. Bladenboro Police Chief Roy Fores examined the dog and reported that he “didn’t find a drop of blood in it.” He also reported that only a small portion of the body of the animal had been eaten. (*News and Observer*, Raleigh, Jan. 6, 1954.)

Two days later, on New Year’s Eve, two more dogs were found on a farm belonging to Woody Storms, a short distance from

† *The author, living in the county seat of Bladen County (Box 577, Elizabethtown, N.C. 28337) when he wrote this paper for the folklore class taught by Professor Guy Owen at N.C. State, later became a journalist on the staff of the Hertford Herald in Ahoskie.*



Bladenboro. Their skulls were crushed, and on examination they were also found to be drained of blood. Gray Callihan, farmer in the area, reported a dog killed on January 1 with similar results.

Police Chief Fores, skeptical of the vampire theory raised by several imaginative townspeople, organized a small search party to track the "beast" on January 2, but the hunting party was hampered by slow travel through the thick swampland, and darkness set in before the animal had been found. Town curiosity was aroused, and an apprehensive atmosphere prevailed in the small town.

Another dog was brought in for examination on the morning of January 3, this one killed at a service station on the outskirts of Bladenboro. On examination of the carcass, according to Chief Fores, "all except a drop or two of blood had been sucked." During the day another dead dog was brought in for examination, this one within the city limits of the town.

With increasing fear and spreading rumors, Mayor G.W. Fussell ordered Chief Fores to form another search party of greater size. Nearly thirty armed local men and seven dogs combed the surrounding Big Bay and Red Hill Swamps in search of the blood-sucking beast.

The hunting party managed to turn up no signs of the animal by nightfall, and nervous residents of the small mill town locked their doors securely, each dreading a return visit of the killer who, this time, might harm more than just a good dog. No sightings were reported during the restless night, but the next morning unusual tracks were found on the edge of the swamp behind the mill section of Bladenboro.

By now, newspapers had eagerly taken up the story and tagged the blood-sucker the Vampire Beast of Bladenboro. News of the strange occurrences spread rapidly through eastern North Carolina, and professional hunters in the state jumped at the challenge of killing the famed animal. Many well-known game hunters speculated on what the beast was and on what might be its origins. Some agreed that its description sounded like that of the black panther, others said it was a large bobcat, and still others claimed it was merely a rabid dog or wolf. The animal's habits resembled those of many members of the cat family, but no one could explain its vampire tendencies, its massive strength, and its lust for blood. Where and what would the feared beast strike next?

Early on the morning of January 4, three men arrived from Wilmington, fifty miles away: J.M. Gore, G.W. Garrett and G.V.



Garrett. These noted hunters brought with them expertly trained dogs. The hunt began about midday from the spot where tracks of the animal had last been found.

The men had no luck in sighting the now well-known beast, but they did learn something about its roaming tendencies. The hunters said that the beast traveled in a circular movement inside about a three-mile radius. This indicated that whatever this thing was, it might have a mate. The hunters, now about forty or fifty in all, also described the animal's tracks as "extremely large for any known cat of the area." The hunt had gone on all day, seemingly close on the trail of the bleeder beast, but no hunter and his dog could outwit any cat, if it was a cat, in the dark. The hunt stopped.

Many more local residents, as well as outsiders, joined the hunt the next day. No sign of the beast was reported during the night: no unusual sounds, no tracks, no drained animal carcasses. Sam Spivey, who came from Tabor City with his noted bear dogs, also had joined the hunt.

On January 5, as the search continued, a dog within a hundred feet of the hunting party was attacked by the vampire beast and dragged screaming into the nearby swamp before help could arrive or a shot fired. The dead dog was soon found, crushed and drained of blood just like the others. Tracks of the beast revealed claws an inch or more long, indicating that the animal weighed around a hundred pounds. The hunt was once again curbed and finally stopped because of darkness.

The night of January 5 came quietly to the small jittery town that was now increased in number by newspaper reporters, hunters, and curious tourists. About eight o'clock after dark, a local mill worker named Lloyd Clemmons and his wife were aroused by the sound of their two dogs growling. Clemmons went to see what was bothering them.

"I glanced out of the window and saw this thing," Clemmons said later. "It had me plumb spellbound." Clemmons immediately got his shotgun to kill it, but the beast slunk into the darkness before he could "draw a bead." He then called the police. Clemmons provided the only vivid description of the vampire beast. It was "about three feet long and 20 inches high. It had a long tail, about 14 inches long. The color of it was dark," he told reporters. "It had a face exactly like a cat," he continued. "Only I ain't never seen a cat that big." (*Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 6, 1954.)

Not far from the Clemmons home, Mrs. C.E. Kinlaw stepped outside her house to investigate the whimpering of her two



puppies. Out of the darkness, the cunning beast charged Mrs. Kinlaw as she stepped on the porch. She screamed and her husband rushed to her side, allowing the eerie creature to escape into the black night. "Near the dogs," Mrs. Kinlaw told authorities, "was what looked like a big mountain lion." It raced from three doors down the dirt street to a few feet from her porch, then turned back when she screamed and her husband rushed out of the house. Chief Fores described the tracks in the road in front of the Kinlaw home as "bigger than a silver dollar." (*N & O*, Jan. 6, 1954.) An armed posse of five to six hundred men searched the mill section surrounding the Kinlaw home until daybreak, but found no sign of the animal.

Hunters compared the two sets of tracks and concluded that there were possibly two different animals.

Later the same night, Police Chief Fores and D.G. Pait, a local man in on the search, were standing in the mill settlement when they heard a dog cry out in great pain. Fores said they could tell that the dog was being dragged into the dense growth bordering the houses. Fores and Pait rushed to the aid of the screaming canine, but when they arrived on the scene there was no sign of the marauder. The victim's body was never found.

Next morning, news of the vampire beast's bold attack during the night hit the front page of North Carolina newspapers all over the state. The many intriguing headlines only served to lure more hunters from North and South Carolina, along with many more curious thrill-seekers from a four-state area. Noted Eastern North Carolina hunters who joined in on January 6 were Charlie Cummings of Wilmington, C.W. Osborne and Lynn McKeithan, both of New Hanover County, and also S.W. Garrett of Wilmington with his famed bear dogs.

Professional hunters from throughout North Carolina tried to limit the number of men and guns on the hunt as much as possible, but they were still plagued with as many as six hundred armed men who desperately wanted to claim the life of the mysterious Bladenboro Beast.

The hunt on January 6 was hampered by myriad hunters and curious bystanders. By midafternoon, all hopes of killing the beast were given up. After a day of futile tracking, the men returned to the point from which they had started, only to find that the vampire had killed a pet rabbit, bitten off its head, and sucked the blood from its body. This had occurred in a territory the hunt had previously covered during the day. The rabbit's body was still warm.



At that point, hunters agreed to set traps baited with dogs in an effort to lure the beast to its death. The traps were set and the wait began. Police Chief Fores called on Bladen County Sheriff John B. Allen, along with the State Highway Patrol, to keep hundreds of cars and thousands of curious visitors out of the area where the traps had been set, but the people refused to move out.

By nine o'clock, hopes faded as hunters refused to turn their dogs loose for fear they would be shot by someone in the large crowd roaming here, there, and everywhere. Mayor Fussell alerted the nearby local National Guard Units in case they were needed to control the multitude of excited people.

Now the problem raised by the Vampire Beast of Bladenboro became a secondary concern to the thousands of nervous armed people mingling on the outskirts of the town. Mayor Fussell and Chief Fores found it necessary to call a halt to all hunting, fearing that someone would be accidentally shot.

Key figures in the hunt generally agreed that the Vampire Beast was a maddened panther that had developed an insatiable appetite for blood and an apparent lack of fear for human dwellings. They also agreed that there were two such beasts, but that only one was doing the killing.

Tension mounted on Jan. 7 as another slaughtered dog was brought in for investigation. Jim White, farmer in the area, also reported that the beast had tried to break into his dog house during the night, but had failed.

The hunt for the maddened blood-sucking varmit continued on January 7, with a record thousand armed hunters on the trail of the creature, along with as many as fifty trained bear dogs and cat dogs. Others, the curious and the thrill-seekers, numbered in the thousands, eliminating any chance that experienced hunters might have had of finding the beast.

In spite of the officials' appeals to the people, the small mill town of Bladenboro continued to fill up with volunteer hunters and spectators throughout the day. The parties searched every inch of the swamp bays surrounding the town, but they found only more people, added confusion, and no sign of the dreaded Vampire Beast of Bladenboro.

In view of nervous hunters, thousands of spectators, and no sign of the catlike creature, Mayor Fussell decided, in the best interest and safety of the people, to call off the hunt. So on January 8, after seven days of hunting and no definite clues as to the whereabouts of the beast, the hunt for the much feared animal was abandoned until further sightings were reported.



The beast had killed a reported nine dogs, one pet rabbit, attacked a young mother, and had been blamed for countless other disturbances since it was first sighted. As hunters packed up their dogs and reluctantly vacated the small town, the Vampire Beast of Bladenboro was left somewhere in the wild reaches of the thick Bladen swamps. Other visitors, spurred by fear and curiosity, also left the mill town by nightfall. It appeared that the Vampire Beast had apparently won the "Battle of Bladenboro." One question, however, remained in the minds of jittery Bladenboro residents as they settled into their homes for the night: Had the blood-thirsty beast really gone?

Five days later, on January 13, a farmer named Luther Davis brought in a half-starved 25-pound bobcat that he had killed around 8:30 that morning. Davis' bobcat fitted all descriptions and tracks of the Beast of Bladenboro. It seemed nearly impossible, however, that a cat so small could mangle dogs nearly twice its size. To quell any further excitement over the puzzling beast, Mayor Fussell reported to newspapers that the Bladenboro Beast had been killed.

Although Davis's bobcat was claimed to be the famed beast, sightings of a large catlike creature continued to be reported in the Big Swamp section of Bladen County. On January 21, a farmer named Berry Lewis reported to Chief Fores that he had found a half-grown hog killed near Big Swamp. Chief Fores examined the hog and found its bones crushed and part of its flesh eaten.

But to this day no one has solved the mystery of the Vampire Beast of Bladenboro.

(Newspaper sources: *Charlotte Observer*, Jan. 5, Jan. 6, Jan. 7, Jan. 8, 1954; *News and Observer*, Raleigh, Jan. 6, Jan. 7, Jan. 8, Jan. 9, Jan. 14, Jan. 18, 1954; *Bladen Journal*, Elizabethtown, Jan. 7, Jan. 14, Jan. 21, Feb. 21, March 28, 1954.)







## WITCHES OF IREDELL COUNTY

by Connie Stone

The North Carolina community of New Hope is located on the Iredell County side of the Wilkes-Iredell County border. This small community is contained within Union Grove, the host town of a yearly Fiddlers' Convention. Despite its proximity to more urban ways of life, New Hope maintains much of its traditional rural heritage. Comer's Store is still the primary secular gathering place for the local residents—especially for the men and boys. Here they can sit and talk and listen for hours on end, while the older, retired or semi-retired men reminisce about their younger days. This is the primary means today of transmitting a folk tradition in danger of extinction: the local folk tale (ghost tales, witch tales, legends, etc. which focus on the surrounding area).

In this small community Roy Wilson Coleman and his wife Ollie Nichols Coleman make their home. The Colemans have lived in New Hope all of their lives (about fifty-five years) with the exception of the years when Coleman served in World War II. Coleman is employed at a factory in the neighboring town of North Wilkesboro, and his wife, formerly employed at a factory in nearby Statesville, is now a housewife and a voracious reader of Gothic novels. They also tend a large garden which supplies them and many of their friends with a yearly supply of vegetables. Not many years ago they also raised tobacco and cotton as well as vegetables.

Witch stories are quite common in this area, and both the Colemans have a fairly large repertory of them. I taped a number of them in March, 1975. He has a special interest in witch stories,

† *The author is a student at UNC, Chapel Hill.*



for his great-grandfather was supposedly a witch doctor. According to him, his great-grandfather was being ridden by a witch every night. Then, one night “. . . this voice revealed to him what to do to get that witch to quit riding him. And it told him how to be a witch doctor and take spells off of people.”

Yeah, my great-grandpa was a witch doctor,—‘cause the witches turned him into a horse. They rode him; and he told it that he’d look back over his shoulders, and said he was the prettiest horse you’d ever seen. And they was this voice spoke to him one day, and told him what to do and they’d never ride him no more. And his momma had to put grease on his back, you know, to get his shirt loose from his back. It’d stuck. And so anyway, when the witch had put a spell on anybody, why he’d go doctor ‘em, you know. And now old Ag-Boo—she was a witch—she put a spell on a man’s hogs; and he sent for Grandpa to come. And [Grandpa] told him to build up a great big log fire and the one [hog] that was the nearest dead, why they picked it up, you know, and throwed it in there—burnt it alive. And by the time they got it burnt, why old Ag-Boo was a-splittin’ Cub Creek up yonder, wide open—she was burnin’ up. And my Grandpa—that’s truth—had to go up there and take the spell off of her—to cure her.

It is interesting to note that the bewitching of cows is a common theme in witch tales. Several generations ago, an ailing cow created serious problems for a family, for she provided them with milk, butter, and/or meat. If she could not be cured by known methods, then witchcraft was suspected. But even then, a definite course of action was available: If one could cast off the witch’s spell, then the cow would recover. The next two tales, the first related by Mrs. Coleman and the second by her husband, offer two different ways of breaking the witch’s spell. The second tale is especially interesting in that although the spell on the cow is broken, the witch is able to protect herself from harm; thus, she is still a potential threat to the community.

Aunt Marthy had an old steer, and she worked it in the garden—plowed her garden, hauled in her wood. And one morning she got up, the old steer wouldn’t eat, and he wouldn’t drink, and he wouldn’t get up. And somebody said that Peg Jones had put a spell on it—and she was supposed to have been a witch. And they took—a neighbor come over and told her, “Take a silver dollar



and rub all over that steer for two mornings in going, and put it under the doorstep." And they done that, so that if she [Peg Jones] would walk over the doorstep that the old steer would get better. Well, she wouldn't walk over it—for three mornings she didn't come about. And the third morning she come to borrow sugar and they asked her in. And when they asked her in, she come over that silver dollar and it broke the spell; and the old steer got up and went to eating.

My Grandma, once upon a time, was a-lettin' a witch have milk, you know. And the cow got low on her milk and couldn't give too much, so she told the witch one evening when she came after milk that she couldn't have no more—until the cow picked back up on her milk. And the witch said, "All right." She went on home, and started down the path and that cow followed her up just as far as she'd go, to the end of the fence. That night the cow wouldn't give no milk. So Grandpa told Grandma to milk her and to get a skillet and pour the milk in—there o'er the fireplace, and boil it and peck it with a reap hook—and when it got ready to boil, to turn it over into the fireplace. And she had all the young'uns out around the house to see that nobody didn't come while she was a-doin' it. And about the time she got ready to turn that milk over, the ole witch stepped in at the door. And she asked Grandma, said she wanted to borrow something. Grandma told her no, she couldn't borrow nothing today. But the old witch picked up a cake of soap as she went out the door so the spell wouldn't get back on her.

It is also possible for a witch to exist in other forms, with her identity unknown even to her spouse until the witch is killed by a prescribed method. A common method of killing such a witch is to shoot her with a silver bullet. This theme is so common in Southern mountain regions, that Leonard W. Roberts has suggested a new motif number: "G275.6 Witch killed with silver bullet" (*South from Hell-fer-Sartin*, 1955, p. 282). The following tale, related by Coleman, is representative of the silver bullet-tales told in the area.

One time they was a man and his wife lived, you know, together in a house. And they had chickens, you know, out (in the yard)—little chickens. They was a hawk come every day just catching them chickens to beat the dickens. His wife'd just squawl at him, quarrel at him, tell him, "Get out there and kill that hawk—get it off them chickens." And he'd shot at that hawk, just knocked the feathers out of it, and ever'thing—and he couldn't



kill it. Some man slipped and told him, go run him a silver bullet, put [it] in his rifle, and shoot it. So, one day she—the hawk—come back. Quick as it did, she was a-squawlin' around there in the house telling him to get out there and shoot it. So he slipped that silver bullet in his rifle and went out there and shot it. And when he come back in the house, he'd shot her.

Despite Richard M. Dorson's claim that "... there is nothing remotely funny about witches" (*American Negro Folktales*, 1956, p. 236), both Colemans tell several stories about witches that are intended to be humorous, and they are. The following are two such tales. The first tale was related by Coleman, who explained that if someone became a witch, he could never again utter the name of the Lord, and remain a witch.

Well, once upon a time, two of my uncles that lived up here at North Wilkesboro—Andrew Harris and Ed Harris—why, they was a old lady lived outside of town that they said was a witch. And so they went out there one night—about five boys with them two—and went to this old lady's house and asked her if she'd learn 'em to be a witch. She told them "Yeah." So they all went in, and she give 'em a broom and told them to do just like she done. And she went to every corner of the house and she said something; but she got a skillet and set it in the middle of the floor and told them to scrub in there with something that she'd put in there. And said, "My soul is as clean from God as this skillet is from the earth"—or something. And she give 'em a broom and she started at one corner of the house and come on around up to the fireplace; she slapped that broom between her legs and says, "Up and out we go." And my uncle was right behind her and he said, "M-y-y-y GOD!!!" And them boys like to killed theirselves a-runnin' to get back to town.

The final witch tale is also a humorous one. It was told by Mrs. Coleman, concerning the death of Peg Jones, who was supposedly a witch. Mrs. Coleman later explained that air often gathered in the stomach of a corpse, and that if the body was not securely tied down, it could "fly up."

Years ago when people died, they didn't bury them in two or three days; they waited several days. And Peg Jones died, and people sat up with her of a night while she was a corpse. And the first night they sat up with her, the cows lo'ed around the house all night long. And then they'd go open the door and they couldn't find no cows



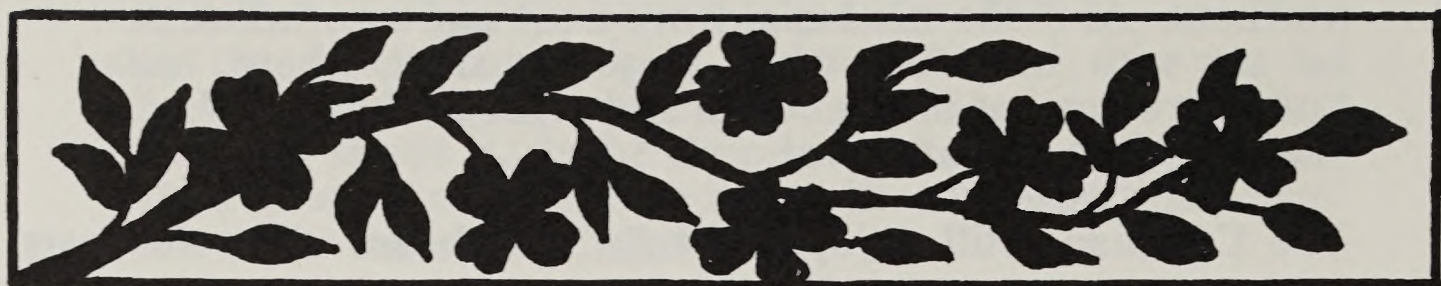
nowhere. And the next night my aunt and another man sat up with her. And while they was sittin' there, her body flew up out of the coffin and went, "PH-E-E-W-W-." And they run out of there!

The Colemans still enjoy the tales they heard and told years ago, although the opportunities for telling them do not arise nearly so frequently today. "Back then" most tale-telling was done when friends and families gathered after working all day, often together. Now, however, most people in the area work in separate places, sometimes commuting to work in nearby towns; thus they are not at any one common place at the end of the workday. Also, as Mrs. Coleman notes, "Back then we didn't have TV, nor even radio. So we always told stories, or listened to others tell them." But today, with so many forms of entertainment readily available, and large, informal social gatherings less frequent, the opportunity for telling tales is greatly reduced.

It is important to note that while both Colemans believe witches really existed in the days of their grandparents, both expressed the opinion that there are no such beings today. Perhaps generations ago in a less technological era, in attempting to explain seemingly inexplicable problems, people made use of the idea of evil supernatural beings such as witches. They had to be dealt with in a certain prescribed manner, like putting salt on their discarded skin to burn it, shooting them with a silver bullet, and cutting their hands off when they are in animal form. With the development and spread of technology, however, more "rational" and concrete explanations, preventions, and cures for the occurrences became available. This may be the reason that few people in New Hope today believe in the existence of witches. It seems that as the "inexplicable" problems became more easily explained and remedied, the witch tales diminished in importance—although, excepting the last two tales in this paper, they are still told in solemn tones. But Mrs. Coleman has another explanation for the lack of belief in witches today: "Witches don't exist no more. There's enough meanness today without them."







## FOLKLORE SAMPLER

The following are excerpts from a variety of entries. Unfortunately, the judges had to restrict their selections severely. The pieces printed here give some indication of the interest and quality of the submissions.

### SAMPSON COUNTY GHOSTS

There was a man that stayed in Beaver Dam and his hair was real thick. It didn't have any signs of going bald. He was coming home from work one night and his car ran out of gas, and there's a little park near where he ran out of gas and you can take that as a short cut to a gas station. Well, just out of nowhere there was a car and a man standing outside the car and he thought, Where did he come from? So the guy asked him if he would like to have a ride, and he said "Yeah." And he said, "Did you run out of gas?" and he said "Yeah." And he kept wondering how he'd found out all that 'cause he didn't never say nothing about it. So this man took him to get some gas, and when he got to the gas station, the man didn't even have a dollar to get him any gas with. So the fellow loaned him a dollar to get enough gas so he could get home. He got his address where he could repay him—send him the money or go by his house. So about two weeks later he goes to the man's house, and he says, "I came to pay Mr. So-and-so. He gave me a lift down the road, and I didn't even have a dollar and I want to pay his dollar back." And the lady just went to crying. She liked to died and had a heart attack right there. The man didn't know what to do; he didn't know what was going on or anything. So the woman said, "Sir, I'm sorry but this man you're talking about was once my husband and now he's dead. He's been dead about four years." Well, that man liked to have a heart attack; he like to went crazy. He



said, "He give me a ride just the other night. I know it was him." She got pictures out and showed him and he described the suit he had on. It was a blue suit with a white shirt and a dark tie, and she said, "That's exactly what he was buried in." So I guess about two years later this guy that ran out of gas and was helped by the ghost or whatever, he became famous because he went bald and he's better known as Telly Sevalas. His nerves went all to pieces and he went bald. Now little sprigs come up and he shaves them off. (Told by Jimmy Hobbs of Salemburg, a student at Sampson Technical Institute)

I had a ghost in my room about four weeks ago at night. I had been dreaming about a girl who had had her head cut off. And I woke up and I felt like someone was in the room with me, and I sat up in bed and saw a girl in my doorway. Ghost! And she was in a wedding gown with a veil on with a bouquet of flowers, and she'd smell of the flowers and then look up at me and smile. Then she'd smell of the flowers, then look up at me and smile again. And I rubbed my eyes to make sure I was awake. And I kept pinching myself and I kept looking. And she kept looking at me, then smelling of her flowers. And I finally said, "Who are you?" and then she disappeared. (Told by Kent Edwards of Roseboro)

Lyn Cunningham and  
Sherry Honeycutt  
St. Andrews College

## PAP'S STILL

Over in Lost Cove, down between Tennessee and North Carolina, about ten miles from my home, there was a bunch of people that stilled all the time; they made liquor and by gunnies they made it regardless of who knowed it or who didn't know it. There was some little boys playing out in the yard one morning and a bunch of revenuers came by. This revenuer asked one of the little boys where the path that goes up through there—where does it go to? The little boy said, "By God, it goes to Pap's still, but it won't bring you back!" (Told by Mrs. Mafra Webb, who grew up in Yancey County and now lives in Huntersville, Mecklenburg County)

Lovelace B. Pugh  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte



## A FISHING STORY

You know I've fished quite a lot, but I never had an experience like that. Now this doesn't seem maybe realistic to you, but Burton and myself went fishing out at Old Peter's Bridge, right near what we call Shantytown. And we ran out of bait and Burton says, "Well," he said, "I guess we'll take a little drink and go," so I heard a little noise in the brush and we looked around, and there was a damn black snake, about three or four feet long, and he had a toad in his mouth. And you know, I don't know whether you've ever fished with toads or not, but toads are just about as fine a fish—I mean bait for fish—that you can get. So Burton—we—broke off a stick, a forked stick, and put it right down over the snake's head and pulled the toad out of his mouth. This sounds ridiculous, but—we're about half tight—and I said, "Well, Burton, I'll hang this snake [toad] on the hook and throw it out in there. Burton said, "I wonder what this snake would do"; he had him by the neck, you know. He said, "Take your bottle and pour a little liquor down his throat and see what he'll do,"—and he poured that damn whisky down the snake's mouth and turned him loose, and that snake just nearly stood up on its tail. I never saw as many didos and maneuvers and contortions and kind of action in my life, and we laughed about it and it crawled on off. And the first thing you know we got a strike on that toad that the snake had brought and he took it on down. We brought it in again and fished with it a little bit; oh, maybe ten minutes and took another drink ourselves, and the next bass took that toad on away. And Burton says, "Well, I guess we'll quit now." And just about that time I heard a lot of noise in the brush, and we looked around and I'm telling you the fact there was that damn black snake back. He had a damn big toad in his mouth, and three others was following him and they had toads too; every damn one of them wanted a drink I guess. (Told by Mr. Cletus H. Lawler, Botetourt County, Virginia)

*(Motif X1321.4.4.2) This is a tall tale in the traditional form and needs little comment. Other versions of this same tale have been collected in Virginia and North Carolina. This version is a retelling and has lost impact compared to the first version I heard.*

*The informant also tells stories about hoop snakes, or snakes which hold their tail in their mouths and move by rolling (Motif X1321.3.1) and which have poisonous stingers on their tails. These stingers can kill a tree (Motif X1321.3.1.2). He tells this as a belief which he takes somewhat seriously, then continues on with a tale of two*



*hoop snakes which paired, each holding the other's tail, so they could roll faster. They became hungry as they rolled and began to swallow the other's tail until they had completely consumed each other. (Motif X1204b).*

Tom Stevens  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

## DEATH OMENS

*These tales were events which happened to Mr. C. R. Hinson, who was born in Union County and now lives in Anson County. Although he does not believe, these events were related about the deaths of members of his family.*

Before 1930, we lived approximately eight miles from Star, North Carolina. Near our house was an old drive-through barn where we had parked our old "T" model Ford several months before. The old car wouldn't run because we had taken the magneter [battery] out of the car when we parked it. One summer evening all the family had gathered on the front porch to rest. On this particular night the old car's lights suddenly came on, and the whole barn was bright as day. Within several days my father-in-law died.

In 1939 or 1940, we had moved to the McLearn home in Wadesboro, North Carolina. On summer nights, we kept the doors open with the screen doors locked. One night, I was awakened by the back screen door slamming. As I sat up in bed, there was a lady dressed in a purple robe wearing a crown. She walked through our bedroom and into the kitchen. I followed her to the kitchen and turned on the light, but she was gone. By this time I had awakened Hattie [his wife]. I only told her that I had heard something in the kitchen. A short time later, my mother died.

*The next two omens were told to me by Mr. O. L. Thompson of Cabarrus County as he had heard them told by his mother. She was about forty-five years old at the time of the events.*

We were returning from town one afternoon in our horse-drawn buggy. I had bought marbles for my sons, Pete and Junior. Suddenly, I heard my father's voice telling me to count the marbles. I counted, "One for Pete



and one for Junior,” until all the marbles had been counted. Three times the voice asked me to count the marbles, and then it left. My father died a few days later.

Late one afternoon I went to milk the cow. In the distance, I could see a small cloud floating close to the ground; and as the cloud came near, it resembled my sister Florence. The cloud disappeared before I could get close enough to touch it. Florence died unexpectedly a couple of weeks later.

*This last omen was told by Mrs. Ruby Bernard of Cabarrus County. She had heard the tale told by her mother, Mrs. Iva Furr. Mrs. Furr's father was sick with the "bloody flux" at the time of the event.*

Even though it was near winter, we had father's bedroom door open. A bird, unusual for that season, flew in and sat on the head of his bed. The bird sang the most beautiful song and then flew back out the door. Within days, my father died.

Patricia F. McGaha  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte

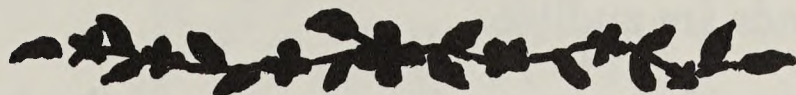
## BLAALOX'S BULL

There was once this bull, BlaaloX's bull, and he didn't have a tail. He didn't have a tail because one day his tail got wrapped around a tree because he was always swatting flies with it. Well, his tail got wrapped around this tree, and that bull just pulled that tree right out of the ground. He took off running with that tree on his tail, and it got caught between two stumps. When BlaaloX's bull tried to get loose, his tail came off.

There was this little bull in BlaaloX's pasture that the big bull didn't care much for. The pasture was closed in by a fence that surrounded a cliff. Well, BlaaloX's bull saw this scrawny bull standing over near that cliff and decided that was the perfect time to get rid of him. So the big bull, BlaaloX's bull, started charging towards him. Well, that little bull might have been scrawny, but he sure wasn't dumb. He saw old BlaaloX's bull coming, so he just stepped aside, and BlaaloX's bull ran right through the fence and off the cliff. Now you may not believe this, but I declare that this really did happen. (Told by Mr. John H. King, Catawba County)

Beverly R. King  
University of North Carolina at Charlotte





*URBAN FOLKLORE.* The American Folklore Society published in 1975 Alan Dundes and Carl R. Pagter's *Urban Folklore from the Paperwork Empire*, a study of office folklore "in tradition, manifesting multiple existences in space and time, and . . . in variant forms." In the chapter "The Extended Double Entendre," the authors give an example entitled "The Wayside Chapel." As proof of the validity of the folkloric element of "the paperwork empire," here is a variant collected by Olivia Legates, a student at NCSU, from a Raleigh construction office. It is reproduced exactly as found.

### CASE OF THE WATER CLOSET!!!

An English lady of title, who, suffering from a nervous breakdown, having been advised to stay in a small German town in the mountains, went to inquire about the lodgings, and knowing no German, secured the assistance of the local school teacher, who knew a little English.

On her return home, she remembered that she had neglected to inquire if there were a W. C. (lavatory wash closet) to the house. So she wrote to the school master, but since he had never heard of the abbreviation before, he did not understand. Therefore, he consulted the local Pastor who also understood a little English. He thought the lady must mean "Wald Chapel" (Chapel in the Woods) and wrote as follows to tell where it was located:

Your ladyship:

The W. C. is located about 7 miles from your lodgings in the center of a pine forest and lonely surroundings. It is open Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday. This is unfortunate if you are in the habit of going regularly, but you still no doubt will be glad to hear that a number of people take their lunches and make a day of it. Others who cannot spare the time go by car and arrive just in time as they are in too great a hurry to wait. The accomodations are good, as there are about 80 seats; but should you arrive late, there is plenty of standing room.

The bell is rung 20 minutes before the W. C. is opened. I would like especially to advise you that you should go on Tuesday for on that day there is an organ accompaniment.



The acoustics on the premises are excellent, as the most delicate sounds are audible.

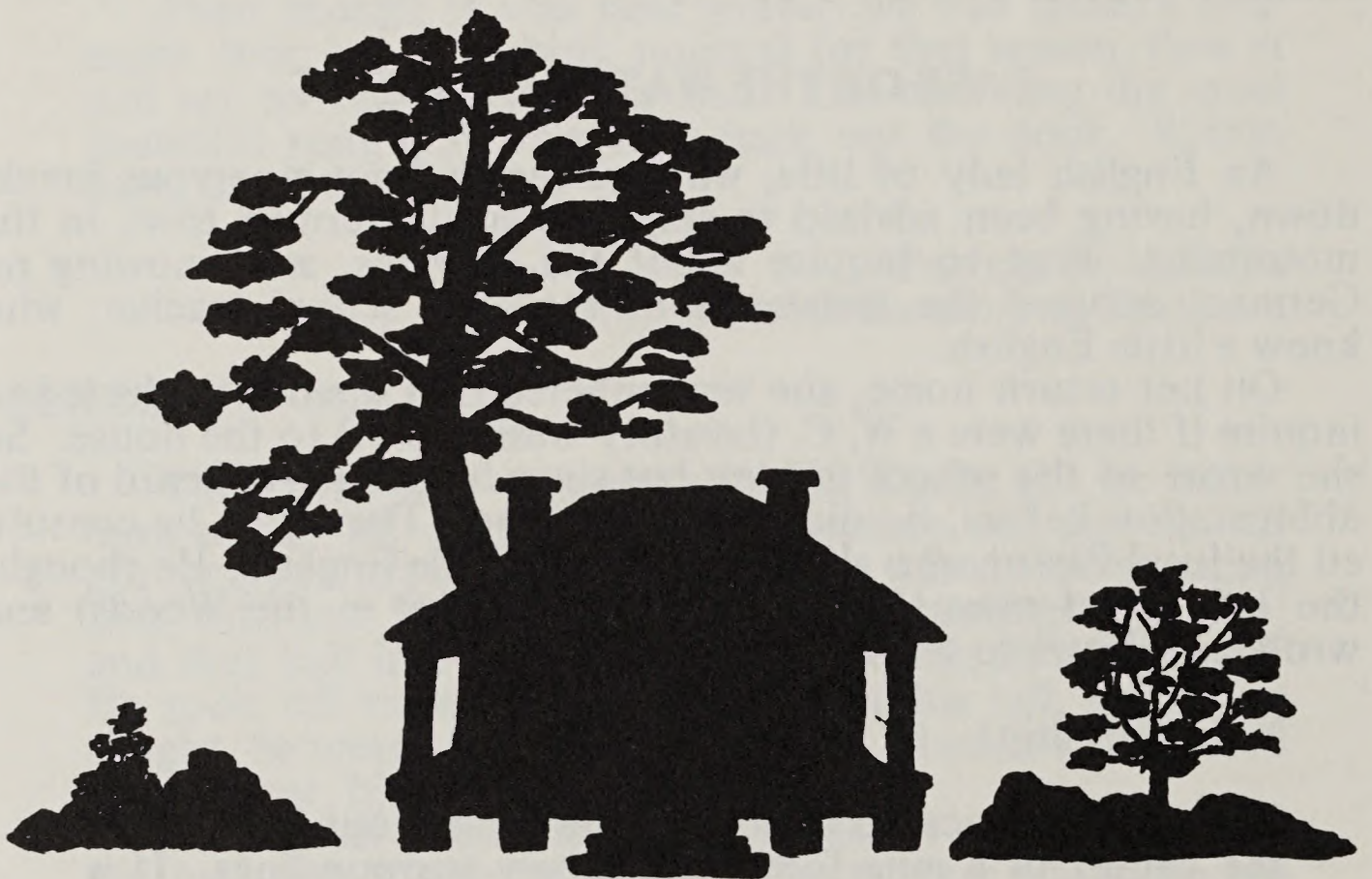
I shall be happy to reserve for you one of the best seats.

I remain,

Pastor "X"

P.S.:

My wife and I haven't been for 8 weeks. It pains us very much, but then it is a long way.



GETTING BACK AT CHAPEL HILL. The November 1975 issue carried an article by Sharon Costner entitled " 'State' Jokes on the Carolina Campus." Well, it seems that Chapel Hill does not entirely escape NCSU barbs. The following joke, much like Ms. Costner's types, was collected by Robert Bell of State:

Carolina pharmacy students are having a lot of trouble. It seems they can't figure out how to get those little bottles in the typewriter.



## Citations

*At the annual meeting of the North Carolina Folklore Society on November 7, 1975, in Raleigh, three Brown-Hudson Folklore Awards were presented:*

**DOC AND MERLE WATSON:** Troubadours of the Traditional. A country song played frequently by disk jockeys these days with the promise, "I'll Be a Legend in My Time." Doc Watson is that promise—that legend—fulfilled. Born blind in a mountain family of nine children, he has overcome dire physical and economic circumstances to gain a place of eminence in the entertainment world. Educated at the North Carolina School for the Blind at Raleigh, through Library of Congress talking books, and through countless hours of practice and performance, he has been honored by academia (a Doctor of Folk Arts Degree from Appalachian State University in May, 1973) and by the professional world in which he moves (concerts at Carnegie Hall and other coveted engagements, plus numerous awards in folk and country music). His son Merle added to the Watson legend when in 1964, while still a high school student, he joined his father in playing concerts throughout the United States. Together they also served as both official and unofficial musical ambassadors to such countries as Great Britain, Africa, Mexico, and Canada. Together they performed on major TV network shows and became the subjects of countless news and feature articles in national publications such as *Life*, *Look*, *Time*, *Newsweek*, *Downbeat*, and *Billboard*. Together they have become, as a *New York Times* reviewer called them, "the best flat-picking guitar team in the United States." Together they have helped to preserve the traditional music of Appalachia and have served as models and teachers for those who have followed. Together—and most fittingly so—they receive today the Brown-Hudson Award in recognition of their achievements. (Rogers B. Whitener)

**CRATIS WILLIAMS:** Master Folklorist of Appalachia. Today the North Carolina Folklore Society presents to Dr. Cratis Williams the Brown-Hudson Award in recognition of his innumerable contributions to a worthy understanding and appreciation of the folklore of Appalachia. He is a master folklorist in this region, where he was born and has remained. His educational career embraces an excellent training in the universities of Kentucky and New York and forty years of teaching and administration, including thirty-three years at Appalachian State University at



Boone. Here he has been a professor of English, the Dean of the Graduate School, Acting Chancellor, and recently as assistant to the Chancellor. Because of the high qualities of his attainments, he has been honored by significant awards and citations. In 1973 the University of North Carolina declared him the winner of the prestigious O. Max Gardner Award for "outstanding humanitarian service." Since his childhood in Kentucky and throughout his academic career, he has never deserted his first love—the collecting and disseminating of the folk culture of Appalachia. This he has told well and extensively in his doctoral dissertation, *The Southern Mountaineer in Fact and Fiction*, soon to be reproduced serially in the *Appalachian Journal*. In this monumental work and in almost forty articles in well-known publications, he has recorded scholarly commentaries on customs and folkways, popular beliefs, folk speech, ballads and songs, and other folk traditions. In his own inimitable manner, he has made this lore come alive in his classes at Appalachian State University as well as in his many lectures far and wide at scholarly meetings. In all his ways Cratis Williams has poured out his own noble spirit, in teaching and writing and lecturing and singing the songs and ballads of his close neighbors in the hills and mountains. His great respect and love for the highlanders come through with splendor. (Joseph D. Clark)

**RICHARD WALSER** has distinguished himself as a professor, literary historian, biographer, editor, and folklorist. These talents he brought to bear, ten years ago, to revive a folklore society declining in membership and a folklore journal maundering in limbo. As a result of his efforts and of his infectious enthusiasm, the North Carolina Folklore Society boasts a strong and growing membership and the *North Carolina Folklore Journal* has gained greater local and national recognition than any other regional journal of folklore. Though known for thirty-five years at North Carolina State University as a dynamic professor of literature, Richard Walser is known regionally as the state's chief literary historian and promoter of North Carolina writing, and nationally as a leading scholar of the writings of Thomas Wolfe. He is author of six books, has edited ten collections and five facsimile editions of North Carolina writings, and has written countless numbers of articles for books, scholarly journals, magazines and newspapers. In all, the focus of his interest has been North Carolina—her writers, her literature, her folklore. As president, as secretary-treasurer of the Society, and as co-editor of the *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, Richard Walser systematically promoted the welfare of the Society and the spread of folklore study. As co-editor of the journal, he established policies that balanced the claims of popular and scholarly study of folklore here; and he sought to foster interest in folklore at every age and educational level in the state. His many services and his continuing contributions to North Carolina folklore are honored today by the presentation of the 1975 Brown-Hudson Folklore Award. (Harry C. West)







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# **NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL**

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# NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL

LEONIDAS BETTS, editor

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH  
NORTH CAROLINA STATE UNIVERSITY AT RALEIGH  
Telephone (919) 737-3336

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The Palmer Christian, <i>Heather Ross Miller</i> . . . . .	75
The Hollerers from Spivey's Corner, <i>Bill Phillips</i> . . . . .	83
E. P. Williams, <i>Ruby Rufty</i> . . . . .	89
Don Quixote Invincibles, <i>Richard Walser</i> . . . . .	95
Cherokee Dancing Remembered, <i>Harriet R. Holman</i> . . . . .	101
The Healing Waters of Shallotte, <i>Harold R. Kimsey</i> . . . . .	107
Folk Motifs in Guy Owen's "Journey for Joedel," <i>Daphne Euliss</i> . . . . .	111

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## From the Editor's Desk

This issue of NORTH CAROLINA FOLKLORE JOURNAL will be the last to come from North Carolina State University. The Department of English and the School of Liberal Arts have provided in the past generous support to the magazine; now that support has ended. With little regret I pass the editorship to the capable hands of others. Believing that the new editor(s) will keep alive the pioneering spirit of Richard Walser and Guy Owen, I look forward to continuing good health and success for the Society and the JOURNAL. I send thanks to all those who have assisted in the perpetuation and improvement of our publication. And I shall always value the friendships I have made. Ave atque vale.

### Announcement of the Meeting of the North Carolina

#### Folklore Society

Friday, December 3, 1976 @ 2:00 p.m.

Hilton Inn, Raleigh

#### Featuring:

Jimmy Mayberry, Rutherford County  
"Sounds of the Dulcimer"

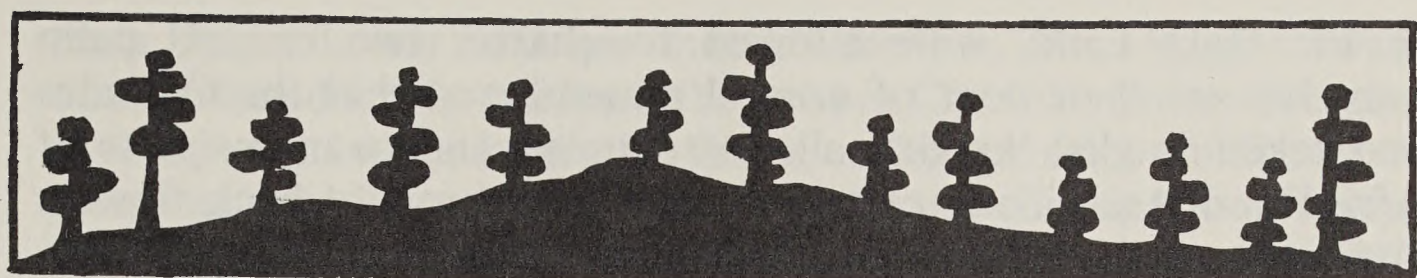
Clark Jones, Central Carolina Community College  
"Folk Songs with the Fretless Banjo  
and Hammer Dulcimer"

Cratis Williams, Appalachian State University  
"Appalachian Speech"

At the time this issue goes to press, final arrangements for the transfer of NCFJ offices have not been made. Please note the inset that you will find in your issue. It will contain pertinent information now missing.

*Leonidas Betts*





## THE PALMER CHRISTIAN

by Heather Ross Miller

I am on the verge of a great intellectual moment—one that involves not only folklore, but also medicine, botany, and etymology. It began nearly four years ago when my husband, Clyde H. Miller, and I were still living in Bladen County, North Carolina. He was in charge of several state lakes in that area, and one of the persons he worked with was DeWitt Powell, Superintendent of Jones Lake State Park, Route 2, Elizabethtown. Clyde and I lived at Singletary Lake State Park, situated between White Lake and Kelly.

It was customary to dump park trash in a large pit provided by Bladen Lakes State Forest, deep in the sand and turkey oaks off Kelly Star Route. My husband and DeWitt were both on this site one day, when they noticed an enormous plant growing near the rim of the waste heap. It was as high as a man and spread large palmy leaves over the smaller turkey oak scrub. DeWitt called it immediately “the palmer Christian.”

When Clyde told me about this plant and about DeWitt Powell’s name for it, my curiosity was taken and I had to see it for myself. It was indeed impressive—almost majestic—growing there alone in the flatlands.

But I was more impressed and curious by DeWitt’s name for the plant. All sorts of analogies swirled in my brain. It did look like a palm, exotic, star-shaped, and its various lobes resembled the fingers of a human hand. I thought of the “palmeres” in Chaucer, people who, when they had returned from a pilgrimage

† *The author (Box 685, Badin 28009) is poet, folklorist, and novelist. Her most recent book, A Spiritual Divorce and Other Stories (John F. Blair, Winston-Salem), was highly praised by reviewers.*



to the Holy Land, were allowed to quarter two crossed palm branches on their coat of arms. I remembered that the Crusades had taken English knights all over Europe and to many parts of Africa and Asia. They certainly must have brought back flowers and seeds of the strange plants they saw. And most assuredly during the Middle Ages, the only places wherein knowledge of strange plants was kept, especially those with any healing or magical powers, would have been the monasteries.

Thus—I reasoned for “palmer” and I reasoned for “Christian.” But I could not explain why the plant was there in a garbage dump in Bladen County or why DeWitt Powell, a black man of the twentieth century, recognized it by such an unusual name.

When I questioned DeWitt about this, he told me that his mother, Mrs. Priscilla Powell, also of Elizabethtown, used to parch the leaves of the palmer Christian in her oven and then place them under the children’s beds to break a fever. DeWitt said she also would crush the dry leaves in a cup of hot water and have the children inhale the fumes when they were sick.

I asked him what kinds of sickness required the use of the palmer Christian. He replied that it was usually a bad stomach ache, cramps, or general fever. He remembered that it was used a lot in the spring or early summer, about the time when the first grapes got ripe, and he and his brothers and sisters would eat too many new grapes.

DeWitt said the fumes smelled bad. He said that his mother shared this medicine with other black people of the Elizabethtown community, but that he had always felt it was definitely handed down in his family, as a remedy belonging peculiarly to them. He remembered that his mother planted the palmer Christian in the yard and did not consider it a wild plant or a weed. It was cultivated on purpose, and she always referred to it as the “palmer Christian.”

I asked DeWitt how it got its name. He just laughed and answered, “Oh, it was always called that. Just that old palmer Christian.”

Nothing about the plant suggested to him the religious or magical analogies that had occurred to me: palm branches, Christ’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, pilgrimage, the healing powers of Christ. He did spread out his hand and say, “Well, it sort of looks like your hand.”

Sometime later I had the opportunity to talk with Henry Lewis, also a black man, who worked as Ranger at Jones Lake



State Park. Lewis told me that his mother, Mrs. Maggie Lewis, often brewed bitter tea from the palmer Christian leaves. She then gave this tea to her family for fever, colds, and such childhood ailments as measles, mumps, chicken pox, and constipation. Henry's description and recollection of the plant was the same as DeWitt's. He, too, readily identified it as the palmer Christian and he seemed to know no other name for it.

So far, I had only DeWitt and Henry's identification to go by. My own references were quite limited. No "palmer Christian" was listed in my Webster's desk dictionary, and at this time, I was either too lazy or too unorganized to check the local library for further sources.

But I did carry a branch of the palmer Christian and some seed-clusters around in the back of my car. I still hoped to find somebody to tell me more about it and its unusual name.

One morning after grocery-shopping in Elizabethtown, I had George Inman, proprietor of Inman's Red & White, put my groceries in the car. He noticed the plant and said, "There's one of those old tick-seed bushes. Why have you got that thing?" We began talking about the plant, and when I told him about DeWitt's calling it "the palmer Christian," Mr. Inman shook his head. "I never heard that," he said.

He shook some of the seeds out in his hand. "We used to flick these big old seeds at each other when we were kids," he explained. "They look just like big old ticks."

Indeed he was right. The seeds looked like ticks you might see on a dog, swollen with blood, dull grey in color, smooth as beans. Mr. Inman had no knowledge of the plant's medicinal uses.

So now I had two names: palmer Christian and tick-seed.

But still no real illumination.

These events occurred in the late summer, fall, and early winter of 1971. I had intended to save the seeds of the palmer Christian and plant them for myself. I did give some to a friend, Mrs. Gertrude Venters of Badin, and she planted them in a flower pot and attempted to raise the resulting plant to maturity. Unfortunately, this plant died, but not until it had attained some good size and was quite green and showy. Mrs. Venters mentioned to me that the plant resembled the old-fashioned castor bean, but it was too much of a variation for her to be sure.

This was the first time I had any mention of the castor bean. It proved, later on, to be quite astute. Meanwhile, my pursuit of the palmer Christian was interrupted for several years. I published two new books, traveled in Europe, assumed a new teaching



position at Stanly Technical Institute, and returned to take up residence in my old home town, Badin. In all this confusion, my original palmer Christian seeds were lost and my notes misplaced. But the palmer Christian was not to be forgotten for long.

In the late summer of 1975, I was browsing through the library at Stanly Tech, when I came upon Alfred Byrd Graf's *Exotic Plant Manual*. On a whim, I looked for the palmer Christian and found it listed as *palma christi*, *ricinis communis*, or the red castor bean. This was indeed a moment of success for me. Not only did I finally identify it as a real medicinal plant: the castor bean; but it was also the first time I had ever seen it identified by any name remotely resembling what my black friend in Bladen County, DeWitt Powell, had first called it: the palmer Christian, the *palma christi*.

I was elated.

Graf's book told me other things. The plant was bold and striking in appearance, attaining often a height of 40 feet. The giant leaves were palmately divided into 5 or 11 lobes, from 1 to 3 feet across. The leaves were bronzy to dark red in color, coloring more deeply as they aged. It flowered and then produced its seed in husks. The seeds were deadly poisonous, mottled and beanlike. Two could be fatal to young children.

The plant was considered a tropical evergreen, was hardy, able to endure sudden changes in temperature, warm days and cold nights, could tolerate neglect. Castor oil was extracted from the beans and used as a cathartic and also as an industrial lubricant. But aside from its obvious practical uses to man, the plant was also cultivated for its ornamental qualities. It was showy and unusual, beautiful and deadly. There were hundreds of varieties.

This was enough to rekindle my interests in the mystery—for mystery there still was. The more I learned, the more I didn't know. I searched through the Stanly County Public Library, and in Webster's *Third New International Dictionary*, unabridged, I found that the castor bean, or castor-oil plant, was of tropical African and Asiatic origin, *ricinus communis*, also called the *palma christi*. The term *ricinus* could be broken down to *ricin*, the poisonous protein in the castor bean, and this name was Latin for "bug."

Thus, George Inman's calling this plant the "old tick-seed bush" was definitely apt. Not only this, but I also learned that there was a castor-bean tick, widely distributed over the countryside, resembling the castor bean in color and shape. Tick seed, palmer Christian, ricin, *palma christi*: the widening ripples were



beginning to bump against each other.

Searching further, I found that *palma christi* was Middle Latin for "the palm of Christ." It was sometimes written as *palmcrist*. And in all instances but one, it was used in direct reference to the castor bean.

That one exception came from William A. Emboden's book *Bizarre Plants: Magical, Monstrous, Mythical*. Here I found a reference to the *palma christi* in a section on the roots of wild orchids: "*Orchis maculata* and *Orchis sambucina* were known in old England as 'dead men's fingers,' 'hand orchid,' and 'palma christi' because the tubers are divided into several fingerlike lobes."

The *palma christi* was thought to be a charm against witchcraft. And parts of the bruised orchid root could be used in poultices to promote quick conception and easy delivery. In pagan times, the orchid root was thought to be under the rule of Venus and thus contained the powers of lovemaking.

In the *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* edited by Gertrude Jacobs (which I found at the Pfeiffer College Library) was a reference to the "hand of glory," a charm made from the hand of a dead man, preferably one who had been hanged. In ancient times, the god or king often served as the sacrificial victim to ensure the continued welfare of the people. Odin was considered a hanged god. And in the earliest Christian cult-writing, Christ is spoken of as a hanged god, crucifixion being considered as a form of hanging.

Who knows, maybe wild orchids, maybe castor beans grew at the foot of the cross on Golgotha or under the gallows of London? In any case, this gruesome wild-goose-chasing seemed to intensify the mystery.

I had definitely established the medicinal and botanical identity of the palmer Christian. But I was still puzzled by its etymology. How did DeWitt Powell's mother, Priscilla Powell, learn the castor bean by its Latin name? Why did she consider this knowledge as peculiar to her family? Why did her son DeWitt call it by the Latin and yet not know it by its more common name, castor bean, or even tick-seed?

I now searched through books on botany, drugs, general medicine, plant symbolism, and Negro folklore and custom. I looked through all the books in the *Frank C. Brown Collection*. The *Brown Collection* contained no references to the palmer Christian or the *palma christi*. There were four references to



castor oil and one to the castor bean. None of them were for the ailments that DeWitt Powell or Henry Lewis had mentioned. There was one very intriguing reference from Alexander County for a cancer cure: "An old woman who claims to be a cancer doctor in our county gave this cure for cancer: Take castor oil twice a day and apply the oil to the affected parts with only three fingers, and always rub it on in the form of a cross" (VI, No. 1006).

The religious analogy cannot be ignored. Three is a magical number, symbolic of the three days it took for Christ to rise from the dead (be cured); it is also symbolic of the Holy Trinity. And the rubbing-on of the oil in the shape of a cross is a part of sympathetic magic.

This further suggests to me the possibility of the castor bean oil being used to soothe Christ's pain on the cross. Or perhaps it was used to prepare Christ's body for burial. Or maybe the plant itself was used by Christ in His own healing of the sick. The castor bean could have been available in that time and area, being of African and Asiatic origin.

My on-again, off-again chase lay here awhile, between orchid and castor bean, until I got a call from another friend, Mrs. Patricia Cox of Albemarle, who had found a reference to "palmi christi" in an old medical book. Here was a new variant in spelling "palmi". The book was titled *Essentials of Materia Medica, Therapeutics and Prescription Writing, Prepared for Students of Medicine and Pharmacology*, compiled by Henry M. Morris, M.D., published by W. B. Saunders Co. in Philadelphia, 1899.

Palmi christi was listed as a Latin name for ricinis communis (my good old friend, the castor bean) and it was followed by a reference to Euphorbus, a physician of the first century, A.D. Euphorbus must have given his name to the genus *Euphorbia* which contains plants and shrubs of the spurge variety. These spurge plants have milky juices said to be bitter and cathartic.

Back to ricinus, and I found that it, too, is a member of the spurge family, having large palmate leaves. Castor bean, tick-seed, ricinus communis, spurge, euphorbia, palma christi. Could it have been that this man, centuries ago, gave the name, "hand of Christ," to the plant that has excited and eluded me for so long? Is this, then, DeWitt Powell's "palmer Christian" and is my search indeed ended?

I hope not.

I have involved a limited number of informants and I have not consulted all the available resources. I have isolated only a few facts: 1) the reference to the castor bean as the palmer Christian




appears restricted to Southern Negro usage, 2) this usage is obviously a speech slurring of the original Latin, *palma christi*, 3) the name does contain religious and magical connotations with roots in Anglo-American folklore.

As to the probable etymology of the name "palmer Christian," I can only speculate that somewhere in the past a Negro slave worked in the household or laboratory of a botanist or a physician and learned the Latin names of many healing plants. He or she passed down this knowledge to children and friends. It emerges today in the customs of black people, however isolated in area or background, as the palmer Christian, still used for healing or for sympathetic magic powers.

But the mystery is not concluded by any means.


For I still do not really know why the name palmer Christian has persisted in the folkways of North Carolina black people. I have chased the wild goose and picked up the puzzle parts for nearly four years now. Herein lie the makings of my great intellectual moment. And if it ever occurs, I shall certainly miss the thrill and the pleasure of the adventures I have had with DeWitt's "old palmer Christian."



**YOU ALL SPOKEN HERE** is, according to author Roy Wilder, Jr., "a handy, illustrated guide to carryin' on in the South" and contains "dialect and quaint sayin's interpreted so sho nuff Yankees and visitors from other foreign parts can parley vouts in corn pone country." (It is available for \$1.50 from Gourd Hollow Press, Box 30862, Raleigh, N. C. 27612.) Examples with translations: "Like a chicken with his head cut off" means "Runnin' ever' which-way; helter skelter." "Grinnin' like a jackass eatin' briars" means "Caught in the act; sort of like a suck-egg dog; when you're caught flat-footed, or red handed, in the cookie jar." "Sizzle-sozzle" was used in a prayer by Uncle Billie Duke, who intoned "O Lord, send us some rain. We need it. But don't let it be a gully-washer. Just give us a sizzle-sozzle."

**TALL BARNEY: GIANT OF BEALS ISLAND** by Velton Peabody is a book of interviews about that famous strongman from the state of Maine (Periwinkle Press, Box 54, Williamsville, NY 14221, \$5.75).

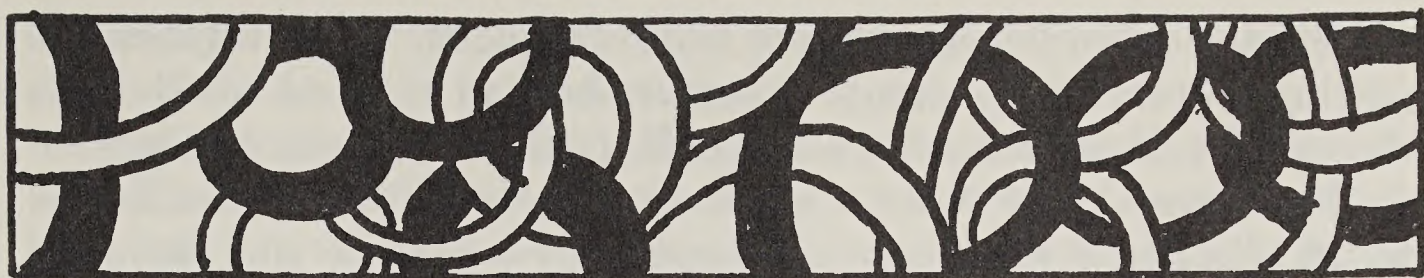




**GINSENG.** In 1849, Charles Lanman published a book titled *Letters from the Alleghany Mountains*, and in it told (p. 124) about a man who lived on the banks of the French Broad River and was a dealer in ginseng, which the fellow described “as a beautiful plant, with one stem and some twenty leaves at the top, and growing to the height of eighteen inches. That portion of it, however, which is prepared for market is the root. The Chinese are the only people in the world who make any use of it whatever,” according to the dealer of 1849; “but with them it has been an article of commerce from time immemorial. It is said to be associated in some way or other with an unexplained superstition. Formerly it was obtained exclusively from Tartary, and the Tartars were in the habit of saying that they could never find it, excepting by shooting a magic arrow, which invariably fell where the plant was abundant. It is not thought to possess any valuable medicinal quality, and only has the effect of strengthening the sensual appetite. It is used in the same manner that we use tobacco, and to the tongue it is an agreeable bitter. It has been an article of export from this country for half a century, and the most extensive American shippers reside in Philadelphia. It is sold for about sixty cents the pound, and my travelling companion told me that his sales amounted to about forty thousand dollars per annum. What an idea! that even the celestials are dependent upon the United States for one of their cherished luxuries,” exclaimed the patriotic Lanman, “and that luxury a common unnoticed plant of the wilderness! Ours is, indeed, ‘a great country.’ ” In the century and a quarter since Lanman’s comment, ginseng has been adopted by many Americans who are just as convinced of its potency as the Tartars and Chinese. See the *Smithsonian* magazine for February, 1976, for an article on ginseng, handsomely illustrated. *The Complete Book on Ginseng* by Richard Heffern is available from Celestial Arts, 231 Adrian Road, Millbrae, CA 94030, paperback, 150 pages, \$3.95.

**EASTER MONDAY.** As we all know, North Carolina is the only state celebrating Easter Monday as an official holiday. Though observed for a long time before 1935, it was only in that year that the General Assembly legalized the holiday for bank employees. Soon after that, state workers were given the day off. A spokesman at the Division of Archives and History opined, “It came principally from the Moravians. They took Lent very seriously, and after Easter they took a holiday to get back in the swing of things.” Maybe so, said Thad Eure, long-time Secretary of State in North Carolina, but baseball had something to do with it too, for in an era when baseball was more popular than football and basketball, it was always on Easter Monday that Wake Forest played N. C. State in Raleigh, and state workers and bank employees went to the big game, workday or not. It was decided that, with absenteeism rampant, we might just as well have a holiday.





## THE HOLLERERS FROM SPIVEY'S CORNER

by Bill Phillips

At the age of eight, Floyd Lee wanted more than anything to be a hollerer. He had heard a neighbor, an older man, hollering, and then he would go out in a field alone to practice what he had heard. It was as if hollering were an art, a skill to be cultivated and developed, and those who excelled at it were respected for their talent. Leonard Emanuel says, "Hollering is a different thing from hog calling, it's a different thing altogether . . . it's not yodeling and it's not calling hogs." What is it then? "Well, it's something like this." He rares back and emits a melodious sound. His attentive dogs join in as if only they know what he is saying.

Hollering, as known in Sampson County, is a strong, conscious tradition. Having a vigorous pair of lungs and versatile vocal chords was an essential part of communication, work, and amusement in the county during the days before radio, telephone, cars, tractors, and other things that make noise and go fast. In 1969, Ermon Godwin, a resident of Spivey's Corner, one of Sampson County's many small crossroads, felt that the art of hollering should be revived and honored in some way. The result was the National Hollerin' Contest sponsored by the Spivey's Corner Volunteer Fire Department. For eight years now there has been an annual hollering contest with accompanying festivities the third Sunday in June. Contestants come from other states, but the best hollerers always seem to be from right around Sampson County. The winners have come from this area.

† *The author, of the Cultural Arts Division of the State Department of Public Instruction, directs the program of folk music in the North Carolina schools. His address is 911 Burch Avenue, Durham 27701.*



Studies of hollering are rare and infrequent. A few articles and passing comments by casual observers have in the past touched on the subject. More recently, a master's thesis in folklore was written at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill by Peter Bartis. Bartis discussed the historical aspects of hollering and then the present-day phenomenon as it exists in Sampson County. The following two paragraphs briefly summarize Bartis' findings:

Early studies of hollering centered on street vendors in London, New York, and New Orleans. There is some mention in 19th-century journals of field hollers in the rural South. Later, Alan Lomax, traveling through the South during the 1930s, described hollerers with his typical psychological perspective: they "shouted, howled, growled, or moaned in such fashion that they would fill a stretch of country and satisfy the wild and lonely brooding spirit of the worker." Most of Lomax's and other 20th-century comments refer to hollering as a rural, black phenomenon, in part contributing to the origin of the blues.

Ironically, the art of hollering in Sampson County seems to be confined to whites; at least to date no black hollerers have been found. It is possible that they are there and just have not been located. Sampson County hollering is divided into two categories, functional and entertaining. The functional hollers were necessary for the work and survival of the community. The hollers for entertainment were just that, vocalizing for the pure pleasure of it.

In numerous trips to Sampson County I have met and talked with five of the winners of the hollering contest and with Ermon Godwin, the originator of the contest and the number-one promoter trying to keep the art of hollering alive in the community. Godwin has a talent for consistently getting the winners of the hollering contest at least a modicum of exposure on national television. I have been most impressed with the seriousness with which the hollerers take their art. They are willing to spend hours explaining the many facets of hollering, of what its use was in old time, and then giving examples.

Imagine the life of Sampson County forty, fifty, or sixty years ago. Lying in the flat lands of eastern North Carolina, it was a sparsely populated agricultural area. There were few roads, mostly dirt, little mechanization of any kind, few radios, and telephones. (Telephones did not arrive until the 1950s.) In other words, there was nothing to disturb the quiet air hovering over the pine trees and tobacco fields. No wonder when Leonard Emanuel walked out to his fields in the morning, he could be heard for a couple of miles giving his melodic "good morning" holler, which began a day



of hearty lung work that would require some kind of holler for most of the tasks to be undertaken.

Calling cows in to be milked could be one of the first functional hollers of the day. In the early days as there were no stock laws, animals roamed freely across the countryside without being fenced. Instead, crop fields were fenced in to keep the animals out. A distinctive call was made for each animal: cow, sheep, pig, and so on. Each animal knew its special call and would respond only to that call. Each animal knew its own caller, too. As Floyd Lee puts it: "We had a pasture, all our neighbors you know . . . they'd have maybe fifteen or twenty hogs in their group, we'd have twenty or twenty-five in our group, the other feller'd have some in their group, and every hog knowed their feeding ground. I could go out there and I could say, 'Whooooaaaa, whoooooaa, pigeeee, pigeeee.' Well that was a plenty, you could hear them comin', as hard as they could."

Dairy farmer O.B. Jackson rises from bed at five and still calls his cows in the same way he has been doing all his life. Soon the cows begin to appear, ambling on their way to the barn. As Jackson puts it, "Animals got more sense that people gives them credit for. If you call a dog out there and you have something to give him, he's going to respond to that, and a cow's the same way, but if you're callin' just to be callin' him, he ain't going to pay you no mind."

Dealing with animals was a big part of rural life, not only calling domestic animals, but listening and imitating wild animals, whether hunting them or just walking through the woods. Leonard Emanuel has a host of wild animal imitations. He can take you on an imaginary tour through the forest on a dark night and give you the sound of the raccoon, the squirrel, and the fox. Then he can chill you to the bone with the imitation of a hoot-owl fight. Then for first-class terror, he describes meeting what he called a shivering owl. "When you're coming along by yourself back on one of those foot paths and hear one of them old shivering owls, that'll near about shake you up." He follows with a sound somewhat similar to the tones of the ghost of your old Uncle Charlie.

Farmers had to communicate not only with animals in the field but also with each other. Frequently one would make a high-pitched holler to his neighbor to attract attention, then would put in loud words that he needed to borrow something or needed his assistance on some task. One hollerer, H.H. Oliver, had an occupation in which work hollers were essential to the safety of the workers; that occupation was logging on the Neuse River.



"I used to help my daddy raft logs down the river," recalls Oliver. Before the day when trucks carried logs to the saw mill in Goldsboro, loggers rafted the logs many miles. Several loggers would pile a supply of cut logs on various places along the river and wait for a rainy spell to swell the river enough to carry the logs. Then each enterprising logger would bind his logs into a raft by a process of boring holes in the logs and using ash pins to tie the logs together. "If you got your raft built before the man did up above you or below you," says Oliver, "you'd untie your raft, and with a 20- or 30-foot oar guide it out into the river. The raft could be 100 or 150 feet long. As you pulled out into the river, you said 'Whup, whooooooooo, whup, whooooooooo.' If it was Mr. Bill Lawhorne or Mr. John Adkins up the river, my dad would say 'He's turned loose. I hear him.' And if your raft was in front and you run on down the river and run on a snag and hung up, you had to holler the man behind you down and tell him what to do. Or else he'd come in there on top of you, and sink your raft, and you too, if you couldn't swim out. So you'd holler to him, 'Whaaaaaaawoooooooooooo, whaaaaaaawoooooooo, tie yours up, pull in.' Then they'd tie up and come down the river and help you get unsnagged."

The most dramatic use of hollering of course was in times of distress. A long mournful holler indicated that someone was in serious trouble and that someone close by should come quickly. Leonard Emanuel tells of a time many years ago when he heard a woman calling in distress from the direction of the river. As he puts it, "I run from my house down the river, and when I got there, I saw a boat come floating down the river and a girl clinging to it. The boat was turned bottom upwards. I swum over there to her and she started to catch hold of me, and I said, 'Don't you do that.' We floated down the river till I saw a big limb sticking up. I worked till I got that boat lodged against that limb. One of my boys and another boy were coming up the river in a boat, and I hollered and told them to come. I told them to get her and carry her up on the hill, and then come and get me." Emanuel was later to find out that several people had been on the boat and a couple had drowned when it capsized.

All the hollerers recall some instance when they were lost and had to holler to find their way out of the woods. "You just wander around in circles," says Floyd Lee. "It's a terrible thing." As Oliver put it, "If you come up to a familiar creek and it's running the wrong way, then you know you're in trouble." The way to get out of the woods of course is to holler and wait until someone



answers you, then follow the answer until you come out to a familiar spot.

Pure amusement and festivities were always a good excuse for hollering. In fact hollering and singing became intermingled at such times. Farming chores which were pure drudgery could be turned into amusement by making them a community affair with a jug of wine, good eating, good singing, and good hollering. Corn shucking was such an occasion. (See *North Carolina Folklore Journal*, Nov. 1974, "Corn Shucking in Sampson County.") There was no doubt that the intent of this fall activity was to get the important task of corn shucking done. But to add incentive, a jug of wine might be put at the bottom of the pile of corn. The first one to find the jug would be the first to get a drink. Of course, there were songs to help the work along the way. One that Emanuel is fond of singing goes like this:

Cows in the old field, don't you hear the bell?

Blow the horn, blow. (Repeat.)

(Hollers) Blow the horn blow!

(Hollers) Blow the horn blow!

We shuck that corn and put it in the bin.

Blow the horn, blow!

Get out the saddle and saddle old Ben.

Blow the horn, blow!

Another source of fun, for some at least, was serenading. This was a folk initiation that a married couple had to go through. On their wedding night, just as the couple had settled into their new cabin, their young friends began marching around the cabin creating a racket with any noisemaker available: tin cans, pots and pans, spoons, bells, anything. The couple, nervous to begin with, was now completely distracted. The ultimate trick was "spooking." As O.B. Jackson explains, "spooking" involved tying a tin can somewhere in the house before the couple arrived. The can was connected by a string to the outside and, when the string was rubbed with resin, the can would emit an eerie screech. "If you didn't know what it was, it would scare you to death. You can hear it all over the house and you can't tell where it is."

Collard-stealing provided an entertaining diversion during the autumn days when most of the outdoor work had been done. O.B. Jackson continues, "Back when I was about 17 or 18, we'd



go collard-stealing. A bunch of us boys and a bunch of girls would gather up together and go by people's collards. We'd get one up [out of the patch] and throw it on the front porch. They'd head out and try to catch us. We'd run away and then go to another house. I've walked till midnight on a night like that, a bunch of boys and a bunch of girls on a moonlight night. That was happy days then. We enjoyed that better than these people think they do now, gettin' in a car and runnin' out and gettin' killed."

A significant part of the social and musical life of this community was the church; religious life seems to have been taken fairly seriously by all. Shaped-note hymnals were used in some churches which aided in fine harmony singing. There was no hollering in church, but when church was out and the people were walking home, they would then holler the tune of a hymn in harmony. Emanuel says that he would be one of a group of men walking down the road hollering in four-part harmony and people would come out of their houses to listen.

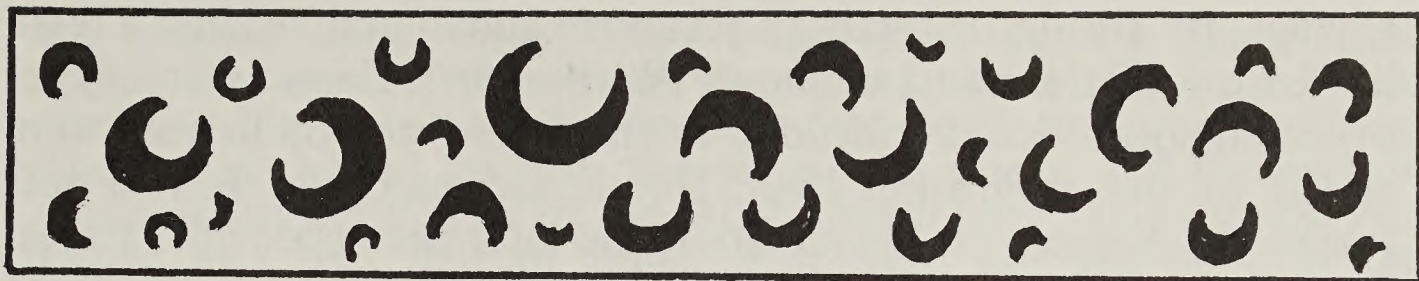
In the last few years, a few young people have taken an interest in hollering and have tried to make the sounds like their elders. But the need and the desire to holler just doesn't exist as it used to. Telephones are too handy, and machinery has replaced most of the farm work that used to be done communally. Actually, most people admit that it was pretty hard work and are really glad not to have to do it now. But still, when you hear an old-timer holler, it's hard not to say those were the good old days—whether you believe it or not.



**THE BLUES LINE: A COLLECTION OF BLUES LYRICS FROM LEADBELLY TO MUDDY WATERS**, compiled by Eric Sachkeim, is now out in paperback (Schirmer Books, 866 Third Ave. NYC 10022, \$6.75). Blind Boy Fuller and Blind Gary Davis are included with selections and pencil portraits.

**US POOR FOLKS AND THE THINGS OF DOG FLAT HOLLOW** by Donald L. McCourry (John F. Blair, 1406 Plaza Drive, S.W., Winston-Salem, NC 27103) is a delightful account of Yancey County social life and customs. The author never went to school, and the publisher has refrained from editing the down-to-earth prose. Recommended.





## E. P. WILLIAMS: A BLACKFACE COMEDIAN OF THE 1940s

by Ruby Rufty

Of the little work that has been done to study minstrel shows in the United States, most has focused on the early years, their heyday, and their merger into vaudeville. But relatively less study has been made of the remnants of the minstrel show era, the minority of those blackface performers who did not leave for the vaudeville stage. In January, 1975, I interviewed E. P. Williams of Salisbury, one of several blackface comedians for J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers Band back in the 1940s. Some of his experiences and insights describe, in detail, the comedy act of the Southern minstrel show. For this reason, these insights into a dying form of entertainment are worthy of note.

The minstrel show had its beginnings in 1799, when George Nichols, a clown and comic verse composer, created a performance from the melodies, dances, dress, and speech of Negroes whom he had observed (Carl Wittke, *Tambo and Bones: A History of the American Minstrel Stage*, Durham, 1930, p. 17). This type of comic act became very popular with white audiences throughout the United States and Europe. Between 1850 and 1870, minstrel shows were at their height in the United States. Blackface singers and performers presented a stereotyped image of the Negro at circuses, medicine shows, gold-mining camps, and street fairs—any place where people gathered. In this way, the singing and comedy acts of the minstrel show became familiar to the average person, even in the smaller towns of our country (Wittke, 64-65).

As the popularity of minstrel groups grew, new acts were

† After graduating from UNC-Greensboro, the author, native of Salisbury, went to Western Kentucky University to pursue an M.A. in Folk Studies.



needed. By the 1870s, variety acts were added and became a regular feature of the minstrel shows (Wittke, 88). Comic stereotypes of immigrants, recent additions to the American population, were added to the repertoire. Irish, Dutch, German, and Jewish acts joined the Negro's on the minstrel, and later the vaudeville, stages. With this conglomeration of acts, often presented by the same actors, some of those who once impersonated the Negro in minstrel shows gradually

appeared in blackface with no attempts at dialect or impersonation . . . . They did monologues and other specialties, jig, clog, and so on, and used blackface make-up. But they were not Negro impersonators; they were blackface entertainers (Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times*, New York, 1940, pp. 78-80).

Some blackface entertainers mixed the stereotypes of the poor shuffling Negro and the unsettled immigrant, changed their accents, and created a new character, the tramp (Gilbert, p. 278).

In *American Vaudeville as Ritual*, (Lexington, Ky., 1965) Albert McLean argues that the more aggressive humor, which eventually developed in vaudeville, appealed more to urban audiences, while the more relaxed minstrel shows reinforced the rural state of mind which wanted to preserve "the toil-won independence of a homestead social order" (p. 27). If we accept this theory and note the rural quality of much of the South in the early twentieth century, we can begin to understand why, according to Carl Wittke, "minstrel shows retained their drawing power longest in the Southern states" (p. 119), and remained popular in the tent shows and on radio programs in the South (p. 129). In this rural atmosphere, where minstrel performers lasted some years after most of the others had adapted to vaudeville in urban centers, my informant E. P. Williams performed in the 1940s.

E. P. Williams joined J. E. Mainer's Mountaineers as a guitar player after he came back from World War II. Mainer's Mountaineers were frequent radio performers on station WSOC in Charlotte. Both their records and personal appearances were in much demand in that area.

When asked why a string band needed a comedy act, he described a typical musical performance of the Mountaineers, in which comedy played one part:

You see, when the show would first start, they would have



the original band there. They would start out by doing some songs, the serious type—more the serious part of the show. We'd start out like doing a breakdown, a fast fiddle tune or something. Then they would go into the songs, the duets, and somewhere along about the middle of the show, they'd have some hymns, you know, and that sort of thing. And then, say, maybe after the hymn-time program, why, they'd start in the comedy act—where the funny part of the show begin to get funny, you know. People enjoyed comedy . . . .

(Question: Now was this while music was going on, or was this while everybody was taking a rest?)

That's right. The rest of them were taking a rest. So the comedy part, that was the funny part that was going on there. Probably it would last, oh, fifteen, twenty minutes. Finally, maybe they'd get wound up in an argument or something, and this one guy would chase him off the stage with a razor. That would be the end of the comedy, you see. Then the band would come back out and do another fast fiddle tune, or something to that effect. And, maybe do a couple more songs, one or two more, and then they'd close the show.

E. P. talked about several comic acts which fit into the Mountaineers' performance over the years. He mentioned the late Leonard Stokes, who was one of the earlier comedians for Main-er's Mountaineers. Leonard was pictured with a blackened face, in an old bent-up hat, and in a vest that was so small that it gave him a chubby appearance.

And we were talking about Leonard Stokes a while ago . . . . He went by the name of "Handsome." And J. E. had somebody else. (I don't remember now what his name was; I know, but I can't think right off; he's been dead for quite a few years). But he did the second part of the comedy with Leonard, and they went by "Handsome and Sambo." And that's the part that you mentioned about blackfaced comedians. And they were doing blackfaced comedian work . . . .

They had certain acts that they would do. Well, for instance, Handsome and Sambo would be like they were going to a barber shop, you know, to get a haircut. They would have an old home-made razor-thing like, you know, like a big old razor blade. And they'd get him [J. E.] up in a chair and they were gonna shave him, and all that sort of thing. And then people got a big kick out of it.

Like Leonard Stokes, E. P. Williams employed humor which did not involve the older type of Negro stereotyping and speech, but involved visual effects of bumbling idiots. Williams dressed more in tramp attire, with baggy pants, suspenders, a big button sign on his shirt, and a hat sitting on the back of his head. Instead



of wearing blackface make-up as Leonard did, E. P. changed his make-up to suit the times.

When I was playing with J. E., I was the only comedian they had. We done cut down to one . . . . I would dress; I went by the name of "Corky," and I did a lot of spotwork on my face. And then from my nose up across my forehead, I wore the V-type for *Victory*. Because back then, the war was going on, and so I, everyone was talking about victory . . . .

And, as I said, I was the only one who was doing comedy at that time. And Glenn (that was J. E.'s boy; he played the banjo with us, and guitar), and so he would come out and we'd do comedy together. And we would argue quite a bit about different things, you know—just going through the act. And Glenn, he would put a pillow in the seat of his pants. And we had what we called a flap-stick joke that we used—slapstick. And it was two pieces of ceiling nailed together with a sucker stick—one of these flat popsicle sticks, maybe you'd call it—in between about four to six inches from the end. It'd be in between these two slapsticks. And so Glenn would come out on the stage and say, "I wanna sing you a song that I wrote." And then he'd sing "After the Ball Is Over," and he'd just sing that over and over and over. Well, when he started, you see, I'd come out and say, "You didn't write that song." And he would get in an argument with me that he did. (And of course, as I said, I was in comedy; I had my make-up and everything on.) And so he would go ahead and try to sing it, and I'd try to keep him from it. And I'd want to sing it. We'd get into another little argument there. And I'd go over here and pick this flap-stick, slapstick, off the floor, and I'd come up and rap him once across the rump. And he had that pillow in there. And with that little popsicle stick in between there, it made the boards stand apart. Well, when I'd slap him across the seat of the pants with that thing, those boards would slap together. And it would pop like a shotgun. And they couldn't figure it out. People would really get a kick out of it and laugh, you know. 'Cause they couldn't figure out why I was a-hitting him so hard—that thing making all that racket . . . .

But we always played a different show. We'd have a different comedy act. And so I never will forget that night [at Wesley Chapel's School near Monroe], the first night that we were there. This old sister was sitting right next to the aisle. She just fell out there in the middle of the floor, and she got so tickled, she just wallered all over the hallway down through there, that aisle. And they just really enjoyed the show.

E. P. Williams talked about another comedy act involving trick gadgets which the audience did not understand. In this case, he was working with Curly Seckler of China Grove. He also mentioned the source of his comic acts.



And we had another act that we used. Curly and I used this quite a bit—where we'd wrap a chain around a man's (one of his) wrists, you know . . . . Where we'd put a chain around there and put a padlock in it, lock your wrists together—like maybe, a set of handcuffs or something like that. And we'd put those things together. And Curly had a pistol that would shoot blanks. And he would shoot at [it] and those chains would just fall off your wrists, just fall off on the floor. And the little children said, they wondered how in the world that could ever happen. You know, how a man could fall out of a chain that quick—and that lock still locked. And so, it was a trick to it. But we'd ask the children, "One of y'all want to come up here and try it?" They said, "Yeh," they'd try it. And they come up there and that little old kid, you ain't never seen nobody try to get out of a chain no harder than they would. And we'd finally have to wind up having to unlock him and get him out. But that was one of the things that we used in our show . . . .

And they just about, well, even in later years, it just about took two to do a good comedy act. But they didn't have to both dress in comedy. Back when I first started, we had quite a bit of teamwork in the comedy business, I mean, doing comedy work. And some of this stuff we used to get out of books. They had books that you could buy. But you had to be licensed and all that, and had to pay the companies to do these acts. So we would, a lot of times, would pick up something from those books that we could work around different, like the razor blade, shaving, you know, with an old razor and stuff like that. And slapstick originated from some of the old acts that they used back when they had to have, well, when they had two comedians work down to one. Like, when I went to work for J. E., we cut out one of the comedians and just had one of the other fellows to work with us, you know.

Finally, E. P. Williams gave his opinion concerning the origin of comedians for string bands. He was asked where the idea of the comedians came from, if from the old vaudeville shows.

Well, I would think that it came from the old shows, movies—the movie type show where they had comical stuff, you know; they used comedy. Sort of like, well, you remember "The Little Rascals" [the "Our Gang" comedies]. They always had something comical, you know. The old show business, in other words, that used to be the thing—back in the older days. It was real fine back then to have comedy.

It was fine back then to have comedy. In the more urbanized areas, minstrel shows of earlier days were transformed into faster and more varied vaudeville performances. In the rural areas, including much of the South, the people still enjoyed the humor of the minstrel performers. But changes are inevitable. Witticisms



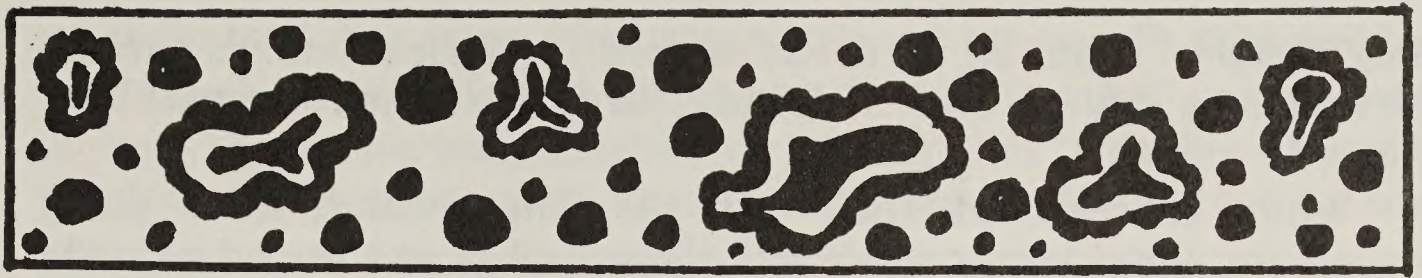
were gradually shortened (McLean, p. 115), and often replaced by more visual stunt work and tricks on the comic stage. And in the years to follow, the mode of humor for Americans, as a whole, would be adapted again, as the rise of girlie shows, films (William Schechter, *The History of Negro Humor in America*, New York, 1970, p. 57), television, and other often comic diversions caught the interest of the people.



**AMERICAN FOLKLIFE**, edited by Don Yoder (University of Texas Press, \$16.95), is certainly one of the most beautiful examples of folklore scholarship with popular appeal we've ever come across. Maps, charts, drawings, and photographs are matched by useful bibliographies and a readable text. Among the twelve sections are "Afro-American Coil Basketry in Charleston County, South Carolina," "Folk Boats of Eastern French Louisiana," and "Tollgate Lore from Upstate New York." By far the most comprehensive treatment of North Carolina's famous Cherryville New Year's Shoot is the 24-page article, Walter L. Robbins's "Wishing in and Shooting in the New Year among the Germans in the Carolinas," where the custom is traced back to Germany and Pennsylvania before reaching the Moravian settlements of North Carolina in the eighteenth century.

**REGIONAL JOURNALS.** One of the most pleasant fringe benefits in the life of an editor of a folklore publication is that he gets to read the various regional journals sent in as exchanges. . . . The **NEWSLETTER OF THE INDIANA PLACE-NAME SURVEY** outlines procedures for high school students in running down the origin of place names in their locality. . . . **NORTHERN JUNKET** (117 Washington St., Keene NH 03431, monthly, \$4.50 yearly subscription) features folk dance and folk music. . . . A recent issue of **MID-SOUTH FOLKLORE** (Box 143, Arkansas State Univ., State University, AK 72467, \$4 sub.) was a "special" for Vance Randolph. . . . **SOUTHERN FOLKLORE QUARTERLY** (Univ. of Florida, Gainesville), in vol. 39, no. 3, had "An Examination of the Holler in North Carolina White Tradition" by Peter T. Bartis of the University of Pennsylvania. . . . **WESTERN FOLKLORE** (Univ. of California Press) has a regular section of "Notes & Queries" in which folklorists can elicit information. . . . **TENNESSEE FOLKLORE SOCIETY BULLETIN** (Middle Tennessee State Univ., Murfreesboro, TN 37132) have news events, notes, record reviews, book reviews, and from time to time an article about North Carolina folklore.





## DON QUIXOTE INVINCIBLES

by Richard Walser

In October, 1854, a strange parade formed in the center of Raleigh and moved out to the State Fair Grounds. Visitors to the Fair were puzzled and amused. First came a brass band; then astride his world-famous horse Rosinante rode a “knight” who was immediately recognized as Don Quixote. He was followed by his ever-faithful squire Sancho Panza and some forty “true and loyal knights” who were “dressed in every fanciful shape their imaginations could divine and on the poorest horses and mules they could scare up.” A few were mounted on “no-horned oxen.” They wore masks and helmets, carried shields, and some of them held “tin swords six or eight feet long, and with spurs of the same material of about two feet in length.” A few had guns. On lettered flags waving in the air, they announced themselves as the Don Quixote Invincibles.

“About midway the column was a wagon drawn by a mule and a steer, in which sat Colonel Buck Tucker, who, dressed as a woman, with a bonnet on his head big enough for a buggy top, was blushingly representing the famous ‘Dulcinea Del Toboso’—the queen of love and beauty—the inspiration that gave valor and daring to the immortal Don,” wrote R. Harper Whitaker (*Whitaker’s Reminiscences*, Raleigh, 1905, p. 50).

The editor of the *Raleigh Star* (Oct. 25, 1854) confessed: “As to ourselves we *know* nothing whatever of the origin of this company, or who they were, but we *do* know they made quite a display in their novel uniform.” The editor felt a sympathy for the “quadrupeds” in the procession, and expressed the opinion that

*Former co-editor of the North Carolina Folklore Journal, the author lives at 3929 Arrow Drive, Raleigh 27612.*



they should "claim an extra ear of corn for their evening's parade, as well as a day or two of leisure, to recruit their strength and vigor."

Whitaker reported that "At the fair ground, after going through a sham battle, in which many daring assaults were made upon imaginary and invisible enemies, a tournament was announced, and the fun of the day began in earnest, as knights on horses, knights on mules, and knights on yearlings, contended for the ring." Finally, a winner was declared. He knelt "at the shrine of 'Dulcinea Del Toboso' [to receive] the victor's wreath, made of collard and mullen leaves," and then kissed "the hand of the queen of love and beauty, who graciously bestowed on him such an honor."

The entertainment was apparently so well received that a "second parade" was set for Saturday afternoon, November 25, and "a magnificent tournament equal if not superior in splendor to any the world has ever witnessed" was announced for the Fair Grounds at one o'clock. Proceeds from the affair—"Tickets of admission, 25 cents, admitting two persons"—would "go to the Ladies' fair for the benefit of the poor" (*Raleigh Register*, weekly, Nov. 22, 1854).

In charge of the parade and tournament would be "his Excellency, Don Quixote de la Mancha, and his efficient aid, Captain Don Buena Vista Monterey del Pombo Bombo," with "Premiums of the most costly description . . . bestowed on the successful Knights." Already "entered to contend for the ring" were the knights of the Kicking Mule, the Enchanted Gun, the Blasted Lyre, the Rusty Nail, the Jolly Nose, the Shanghai Feather, the Severe Frost, the Dark Eye, and the Awful Yarn—to say nothing of the very Green Knight, the great Unwashed Knight, the Hifalutin Knight, and finally three knights with the rather unusual names of Bou Maza Yussup Hamel Abd 'Allah Hassau Mohammed Effendi, Ching-Fung-Long-Tong-Boo-Hoo, and We-chee-o-poo-gowa-shaw-fud-gee. The champion from among these knights was to "receive the crown from the hands of the illustrious lady, Donna Dulcinea del Toboso, who will preside as Queen of Love and Beauty."

In the Trotting Match, the following steeds had been entered: Rosinante, of course; then Fatty, that "shuck-fed pony ridden by Napoleon at the Battle of Cowpens"; Roaring Volcano, "the Bay horse on which the allied Admirals were mounted at the bombardment of Sebastopol"; Dot, and Carry One, "the three-legged mule which towed the open boat in which Alexander the



great crossed the Alps after the battle of Moscow"; Impossible, "the identical horse which came out of Noah's Ark," and now set to "run against his own shadow for a private bet"; Yankee Doodle, "the Arab steed which the poet called for, a descendant of the wooden horse that took Troy"; Old Drowsy, "the matchless trotter favorably known on account of the fleetness when carrying the Mail from Raleigh to Weldon, which feat he frequently performed in fifty one hours, two minutes and nine seconds, 'long time ago' "; and Donner Und Blitzen, "the war-horse which bore Gen. Mynheer Van Dunk through the campaign in which the Dutch took Holland." It was advertised that "A number of others equal in blood and speed [had] likewise been entered."

One hopes that the parade and tournament were as splendid as the wording of the advance notice.

In a day when Cervantes' novel was popular reading, when sports of medieval chivalry as portrayed in Scott's *Ivanhoe* and *The Talisman* were emulated in the romance-minded South, ring tournaments exhibiting "horsemanship and pagentry" were not uncommon in North Carolina. (See Guion Griffis Johnson, *Ante-Bellum North Carolina*, 1937, pp. 184-85.) Yet oddly enough, the burlesque shenanigans of the Don Quixote Invincibles and comparable groups seem to have antedated the quite formal ring tournaments.

The Raleigh parade to the State Fair was similarly enacted elsewhere in North Carolina. It seems likely that scrubby processions by brassy village showoffs were already customary here and there, and in Raleigh only the absurd tournaments and the name Don Quixote Invincibles were innovative. Probably the DQI's—for they were quickly better known by the initials than by the full name—were a take-off on the Christmastide antics of the slaves' John Kuners. (See my "His Worship the John Kuner," *NCFJ*, Nov. 1971, pp. 160-72.)

At the Edgecombe County fair in late October, "The Tarboro' Squad of those renowned Invincibles paraded . . . , exciting the amusement of the fair spectators, the astonishment of the orderly, and the inquisitiveness of the children and the darkies. They made quite a formidable display, if not a warlike one; and after performing several evolutions and revolutions, they dispersed, being doubtless satisfied that they had acquired 'glory enough for one day' " (*Southerner*, Tarboro', Nov. 4, 1854).

The name Don Quixote Invincibles spread quickly within North Carolina, but not into areas outside the state. On October



25, at the Virginia and North Carolina Agricultural Fair in Petersburg, "Santa Anna's [sic] Body Guards, numbering 50 or 60, paraded the streets [at 3 o'clock], went to the Fair Grounds, and there tried the speed of their *colts*," wrote a correspondent to the *Southern Weekly Post* (Raleigh, Oct. 28, 1854). "*They* are similar to your D.Q.I's—cut quite as ludicrous an appearance. The citizens and strangers seemed delighted, and all joined in a merry laugh at the *bonnets* and general equipage of Santa's household."

At the county fair in Fayetteville in 1855, the good local people were exposed to what was called "the ridiculous performances of a passing company of Don Quixote Invincibles" (Johnson, p. 185), and two years later a Fayetteville correspondent, reporting on the Cumberland County fair, noted: "At an early hour, a *grotesque company*, habited in every imaginable costume, riding the *poorest animals* that could be picked up, made their appearance on the field, after having perambulated the principal streets of the town, to the no little amusement of the populace. They went through some *imposing ceremonies*, a most ridiculous style, and after a *serub race* around the course, retired amidst the shouts of the young ones and darkies." (*Daily Express*, Petersburg, Va., Nov. 10, 1857).

Two weeks earlier, at the "great Fair in Raleigh," roving reporter John N. Bunting of the weekly *Live Giraffe* wrote under his pseudonym "Mose" of the arrival of the Don Quixote Invincibles. "I will be-dad-ding-dum, if I didn't think the d---l and all his kin folks had come," he allowed, though he "suspected they were all democrats who were not able to buy fine clothes so they had concluded to come in their every day ones" (*Mose's Letters*, Raleigh, 1858, p. 76).

By 1858, the Don Quixote Invincibles had become somewhat trite, even objectionable, and the editor of the *Raleigh Register* (weekly, Oct. 6, 1858) took pleasure in reporting "that a number of young gentlemen of Raleigh [had] determined upon having a Tournament during the State Fair. This will be another inducement to strangers to attend. We are glad that a Tournament is to take the place of that abominable and now stale exhibition of fantasticals, styling themselves D.Q.I's. The young gentlemen who have the matter in hand are now engaged in preparing costumes, lances, &c., and everything will be in readiness at an early day."

In Wilmington, the DQIs had presumably been active for several years at Christmas, but by 1859 were somewhat subdued. Though the local authorities "let the boys have their way so far as mere noise [was] concerned [and there was] much firing of



crackers, rockets, sarpients [sic], etc., and a good deal of cheering and shouting,” the fact remained that the “Don Quixotes were not strong. A crowd on foot preceded by an ox team was quite amusing. John Kuner was feeble. . .” (*Wilmington Journal*, Dec. 29, 1859).

At Christmas time during the Civil War, when horses were scarce and fairs were no longer held, the DQIs paraded on foot, their outlandish costumes bringing smiles to the war-weary citizens. The “tradition to the people of Raleigh,” wrote one who observed them, “is indelibly associated with the merriment and fun of youth on innocent pleasure bent” (quoted by William S. Powell, in “Old Timers Had Big Christmas,” *News and Observer*, Raleigh, Dec. 23, 1951).

During the last decades of the century, DQI-like groups sprang up throughout the state. In Caswell County, Charles Napoleon Bonaparte Evans’s Foolkiller (see *NCFJ*, Aug. 1975, p. 70) had no use for the ostentatious fellows. “I slathered the goose grease out of ‘Capt. Lea’s Cavalry company’—of the Calithumpian [sic; *callithumpian* describes a parade as noisy and boisterous] gender—during the Christmas holidays while it was on parade in Yanceyville. The boys were charging and cowering [sic] about town on horseback, each fellow armed with a fence rail and carrying one or two of John Barleycorn’s spurs in his head, when I put in appearance with my death dealing club, and they outran a yankee cavalry company, but it was no use, they were my meat” (*Milton [N. C.] Chronicle*, Feb. 13, 1879). Obviously the Foolkiller, whose only purpose in life was to seek out and assault stupid and intolerable characters, had no use for Captain Lea’s Cavalry Company.

In Cleveland County to the west, according to Clyde R. Hoey, the caper-cutting young men at Christmas were said to be “riding the fantastic,” while in Northampton County to the east, remembered A. C. Stephenson of his growing-up days in the village of Severn, the sport was termed “Riding Ragamuffin.” Over at nearby Pendleton, riders adorned their mules “with streamers made of crepe paper and old neckties” and had them “prancing all over the town” (*State* magazine, Raleigh, Dec. 17, 1949, p. 3). Obviously, the Christmas tomfoolery of young men throughout North Carolina was essentially the same, whether in Raleigh or Yanceyville, in Cleveland or Northampton County.

By the turn of the century, the DQIs were still appearing in Raleigh, where on Christmas morning the boys and young gentlemen dressed up in false faces and tattered garments and paraded



the streets in groups. The letters DQI, some believed, stood for Durned Queer Individuals. "As a boy," wrote Dr. Hubert A. Royster of Raleigh, "I was afraid of the D.Q.I.'s, but when I was older I put on some on some old clothes and joined them in their raids. Some of our old folks in the 1880's thought the D.Q.I.'s were the last dying, imitative remnant of the KKK." Meanwhile, noisy music had become part of the celebration. The DQIs were rarely without their brass cow bells and tin Lula Gal horns. No longer fearful of the pranksters, kindly ladies of the town invited the costumed fellows into their parlors for a visit. (Bell Battle Lewis, "Incidentally," *News and Observer*, Dec. 26, 1954, Jan. 2, 1955; Margarette Wood Smethurst, "Carolina Cavalcade," *ibid.*, Jan. 4, 1955.)

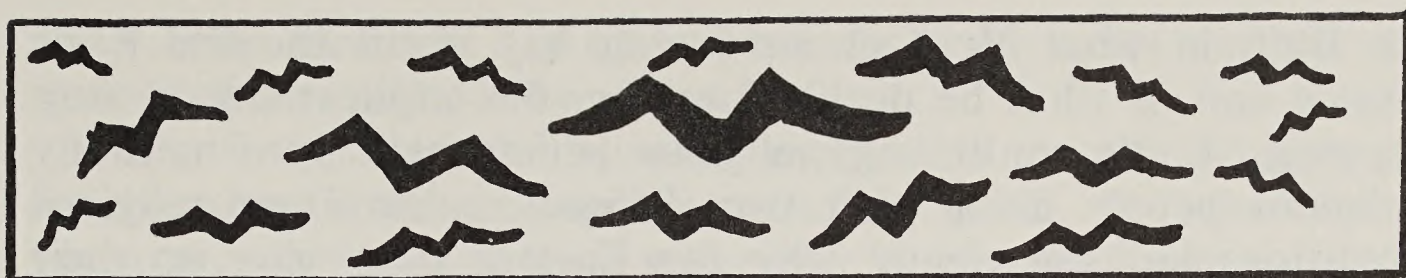
But the DQIs were passing into oblivion. Few townspeople even remembered that the initials stood for Don Quixote Invincibles. An old-timer thought the expression "originated from the peculiar sound made by some of the horns that the youngsters used to blow. The noise sounded something like 'Dee-Que-Eye' " (*State*, p. 3).

[Dr. Tom Parramore, professor of history at Meredith College and the most indefatigable reader of 19th-century newspapers I've ever known, provided me with a number of the DQI references cited.]



**NORTH CAROLINA ON THE MOVE.** New area publications on folklore and folklife continue to come to our desk. SWEET BESS (106 Willow St., S. W., Lenoir, NC 28645, \$6.00 a year) is a student publication concentrating on folkways and local history in Caldwell County. Congratulations to the editors on a most promising beginning. . . . The most recent issue of KIN'LIN' (Hallsboro High School, Hallsboro NC 28442, \$1 each issue) has short articles on bird superstitions and early Hallsboro inhabitants, plus some ghost stories and a version of that famous North Carolina ballad "Naomi Wise." . . . The current SEACHEST (Cape Hatteras School, Box 278, Buxton NC 27920, \$6.00) contains information on quilting, sharks, and square knotting. . . . HOME-SPUN (Box 1439, Lexington NC 27292) is subtitled "a magazine of folklore, oral history, and creative writing by the elementary students in the Davidson County Public Schools." Its editors get out four issues a year—a really ambitious program. A recent issue continued a series on gravestones in the county with an illustrated article on the location and history of "pierced" grave markers.





## CHEROKEE DANCING REMEMBERED:

### WHY THE EASTERN BAND ABJURED THE OLD EAGLE DANCE

by Harriet R. Holman †

Oral history as related by Lawrence Calhoun of the Big Cove section of Cherokee, North Carolina, and taped by Mary Chiltoskey (Mrs. Going Back Chiltoskey) at Cherokee on February 25, 1973,<sup>1</sup> offers an interesting bit of tribal history along with partial instructions for a night-long series of dances in the order prescribed for the Cherokees in the North Carolina mountains by an almost-obliterated tradition.

Accompanying himself with a gourd rattle, he sang, demonstrated some of the motions, and talked about five dances. For lack of a drummer to accompany him, he would not sing or perform the Beaver Dance, and he would neither sing nor illustrate the old Eagle Dance, which differed significantly from the Eagle Dance as revived in 1940 and subsequently adapted in 1950 for Kermit Hunter's *Unto These Hills*, outdoor drama given at Cherokee every summer. The standard popular work on Cherokee dances by Frank G. Speck and Leonard Broom in collaboration with Will West Long is *Cherokee Dances and Drama* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1951). It offers specific instructions for reproducing similar dances, but the only Eagle Dance which Speck and Broom ever saw was the "different one" put on in 1940 (p. 44). Comparison of the Speck-Broom accounts with Mr. Calhoun's indicates a considerable erosion since the 1935-36 transcription of Frank G. Speck.<sup>2</sup>

† The author is professor of English at Clemson University in South Carolina.



Both in what Mr. Calhoun had to say about the Old Eagle Dance and in what he declined to say, the implications of overlapping, if not conflicting, religious beliefs held by a naturally religious people living with two different cultural and religious traditions indicate clearly why the Eastern Band gave up their dancing honoring the Eagle, which was both the American national symbol and, according to old beliefs, the sacred spirit governing all things pertaining to the skies—the powerful spirit invoked in winter, after war, to initiate the young men into an understanding of the hardships endured by their fathers.

Mr. Calhoun (b. May 27, 1901) has lived all his life on the Cherokee Reservation, properly known as the Qualla Boundary. His home is at Big Cove, which Leonard Broom a generation ago characterized as “the settlement that resisted European cultural intrusions and preserved its ceremonial heritage more effectively than other groups or towns of the Eastern band.” The Big Cove band, he said in 1951, could “boast of never having ceased their native dancing” (p. viii) though dancing of course is not identical to a night-long sequence of dances. Despite the fact that Mr. Calhoun obviously understood the questions that Mrs. Chiltoskey directed to him in English, he spoke, except for one word, entirely in a Cherokee language so cadenced that the ear does not readily distinguish where speech leaves off and singing begins. He does not use English for important subjects.

A small group of Cherokees including Jerry Wolf, devoted local historian, had gathered to watch Mr. Calhoun dance and hear his music and his explanations. They either interpreted or, as when a gesture indicated that a dancing circle moved counterclockwise, explained for the tape. He is, they believe, the last surviving member who witnessed a night-long dance or, more accurately, a night-long sequence of dances in the traditional order. He is the only one who knows them in their proper order. As a boy he had accompanied his father “a few times” to dances. No one else remembered.

In his time, these occasions were primarily social gatherings rather than the pep rallies with which men psyched themselves for dangerous action, or the symbolic mystical religious rites which popular fancy assumes all Indian dances to be. These social occasions made special provisions for both women and non-Cherokees as participants, possibly reflecting some influence from the socializing of their white neighbors, though women had always enjoyed considerable status among the Cherokees.<sup>3</sup> If Mr. Calhoun



knew why tradition had prescribed an exact order for the sequence of dances, he did not speak of it.

The first dance, the Mixed Dance, went on till midnight or longer, sung to the accompaniment of the rattle. In it the Cherokee man, taking for partner whomever he chooses, turns or twirls his partner. "About like ballroom social dancing," Mary Chiltoskey described it. That partner might be a Cherokee woman or a non-Cherokee, man or woman, interpreted by Mr. Calhoun's audience as "a somebody else."

After the Mixed Dance, the proper sequence called for the Eagle Dance, which, though brief, might be repeated the rest of the night.

No matter how long it lasted, the Eagle Dance was followed by the Bear Dance, in which the dancers circled counter-clockwise, then turned and clawed bear-fashion, playfully, at the man behind when tempo of voice and rattle changed.

This in its turn was followed by the Corn Dance, symbolizing, Mr. Calhoun said, the joys of harvest-time, with a leader and a second leader (a woman?) singing, while every woman made motions of gathering corn in her apron, then, moving counter-clockwise, faced a man and gave him an ear, which he put in his pocket.<sup>4</sup>

The fifth dance, the Beaver Dance, Mr. Calhoun did not perform or talk about, because there was no drum to accompany him. Then came the Quail Dance, to the accompaniment of the rattle and the singing of a leader, in which the men followed him with little quail steps in the ragged, unpredictable manner of a covey, stepping heavily when they moved forward and lightly when they moved back. At the end they all huddled together, as a covey of quail would do.

The dancing, with other dances which Mr. Calhoun did not describe, went on in sequence till daylight or later.

His hearers tried to get him back on the subject of the Old Eagle Dance, for the Eagle Dancer has become a potent figure among modern Cherokees after his adoption as the logos for *Unto These Hills*. But Mr. Calhoun never saw the Old Eagle Dance, nor would he sing any parts of the music nor demonstrate any steps of the dance, though he did not disclaim knowing them.

There had been a time when the consequences of a night-long celebration of the dance were so disastrous that ever afterwards the Cherokees feared to call down from the heavens such destruction upon the world around them. It happened when Mr. Calhoun's father was young, perhaps in 1893, but more probably in



1899 just after the Spanish-American War. The Eagle Dance went on all night, at least partly, as Mr. Calhoun reiterated, in honor of the eagle's being the national symbol. After the dance, the skies opened, pouring out a deluge that filled all the hollow trees of the forest. Then came a catastrophic freeze which exploded trees all across the mountains.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter the Eastern Band danced the old rites of the bird of the heavens no more.

Most of what Mr. Calhoun said about the Old Eagle Dance had to be coerced from him, perhaps for no better reason than that the old man was tired from the full hour of singing and dancing and remembering how it had been. In the Eagle Dance, he said, men had been away on a long journey. They returned, singing and dancing, to the hall or campfire where the dance was taking place. There the women were waiting to join in, each waving a fan of exactly seven eagle feathers.<sup>6</sup> (Cherokees, like Europeans and their American descendants, consider seven a number of special portents; it also represents the seven clans into which the Cherokee Nation was divided.) A drum accompanied the singing. Otherwise there was no special equipment, no costumes, the participants dressed in whatever they had worn during the day. Mr. Calhoun ignored the question of a woman (Virginia Million, long resident among the Cherokees) with a Middle Western accent: Did they dance the Eagle Dance, as the Rain Dance was done in the West, to bring on the cold and the rain? Though historical accounts, like the report of Lt. Henry Timberlake in the eighteenth century,<sup>7</sup> indicate that the answer at one time would have been in the affirmative, Mr. Calhoun's silence suggests that the question should not have been asked, or that he did not know the significance of the Rain Dance.

When Mrs. Chiltoskey tried to coax him to sing a little of the music or show just one step, his reply made the man laugh. No, he said, it might freeze.

With grace she acceded to the immovable. "Let's don't have any hard freeze," she said. "The groundhog is already out, and we'll just leave it at that."

It does not take an anthropologist to recognize the ironic dilemma of the dancers on the Qualla Boundary that cold day years and years ago. Respectful of tribal tradition, patriotic, careful of the environment they knew would have to continue to support them, profoundly religious, they had to believe their actions responsible for the great destruction wrought by rain and bitter cold, but they could not be sure which divine power had brought



retribution upon them. The fierce old Eagle spirit of the heavens? Or the white man's God who was now their own, angry that they had for one night turned back to the old ways?

This is the point at which folk memory—the province of history and anthropology—is transmuted into myth, legend, folktale, which are the province of literature. One current theory hypothesizes that myth-making is universal man's method of imposing order upon a chaos he cannot otherwise deal with, as Gerald A. Larue for one has stated in *Ancient Myth and Modern Man* (1975). This Cherokee folk memory of violently destructive winter weather and consequent consternation following upon their Old Eagle Dance, then, is the very stuff of which myth is made. A provocative rhetorical question posed by Larue—what a myth will look like to men after nine generations on a space platform—gives some urgency to the importance of salvaging this bit of history. Before it is transmuted into myth, the facts lost in the vapors of time and space intervening between us and that eventual space platform, Lawrence Calhoun's memories caught on Mary Chiltoskey's tape merit the more enduring record of print.

\* \* \*

<sup>1</sup> In addition to my own copy of Mrs. Chiltoskey's tape, there is one copy on deposit with the Manuscript Department of the Perkins Library at Duke University; one copy in the hands of Dr. Edith Card, of the Clemson University Department of Music, who is at work on an ethnomusicological transcription; and another in the hands of Charles Daniel, of Tallahassee, Florida.

<sup>2</sup> Broom suggests that their findings ought also be compared to earlier ethnological studies, particularly James Mooney and Frans M. Olbrechts, *The Swimmer Manuscript, Cherokee Sacred Formulas and Medical Prescriptions*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin 99, Washington, D. C.

<sup>3</sup> Witness most notably the policy-making positions of Peace Woman, called also the Blessed Woman or the Beloved Woman, and War Woman. Note also William Bartram's accounts of Cherokee girls.

<sup>4</sup> This Corn Dance is similar to but different from the Green-Corn Dance of Speck and Broom, which obviously had its origin as a springtime fertility rite.

<sup>5</sup> The Old Eagle Dance was a traditional celebration of victory, peace after war. The National Climatic Center in Asheville has no



data on severe winter weather but referred me to the North Carolina Department of Cultural Resources. There, with devotion above the call of duty, Sandra J. Harrison, Reference Librarian of the Information Services Section of the Division of the State Library, researched newspapers, periodicals, and clipping files to provide two possible dates, 1893 and 1899. On January 17, 1899, the tidal Brunswick River at Wilmington froze from bank to bank with ice thick enough to skate on.

<sup>6</sup> But not according to Mooney, or to Broom and Speck. The latter specify five feathers on a sourwood wand  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch wide and 21 inches long (pp. 39-40, 100-101).

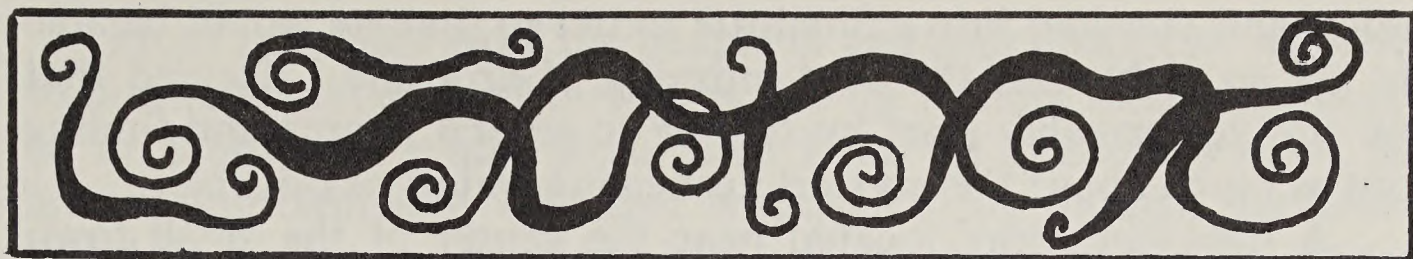
<sup>7</sup> *Memoirs, 1756-1765*, ed. S. C. Williams (Johnson City, Tenn.: Watauga Press, 1927), pp. 63-64.



**“GET YOUR ASS IN THE WATER AND SWIM LIKE ME”:** **NARRATIVE POETRY FROM BLACK ORAL TRADITION** (Harvard University Press, \$12.50) is a collection gathered by Bruce Jackson from low-life storytellers, and while the “poems” are full of plain language and energy, this is hardly a book to be placed in the library at the high school. Unshockable adults will have a merry time leafing through the many pages.

**BRIEFS.** The Virginia Folklore Society (115 Wilson Hall, Univ. of Va., Charlottesville, VA 22903) had a filmography of some 200 films dealing with folklore. Copies of it are available on requests from teachers of courses in folklore. . . . The Patterson’s Mill Country Store, off NC 54 on Farrington Road near Chapel Hill, is operated by John and Elsie Booker. It carries antiques, collectibles, and North Carolina crafts in an “authentic country store atmosphere,” according to the operators. . . . *Twigs XII* (no. 1), edited at the Pikeville College Press of the Appalachian Studies Center, Pikeville, KY 41501, carries an episode “The Flim-Flam and the Buried Treasure” in the infamous career of that noted North Carolina con-artist Mordecai Jones created by Guy Owen. . . . Michael Mendelson (John Edwards Memorial Foundation, Inc., at the Folklore and Mythology Center, University of California, Los Angeles, CA 90024) is compiling an annotated Bibliography of Fiddling in North America and would like to hear from all fiddling scholars.





## THE HEALING WATERS OF SHALLOTTE

by Harold R. Kimsey †

My curiosity was aroused while reading about the “healing waters” of Shallotte in *Legends of the Outer Banks and Tar Heel Tidewater* (1966) by Charles Whedbee. He expressed the idea that the special power of the water might be caused by an antibiotic produced by an unclassified mold. Since my present study is microbiology, I decided to investigate.

At first I tried to contact him and find out who the “several doctors and chemists” (p. 4) were who sincerely believed in the water’s healing power. After failing to do so, I decided to make a trip to Shallotte in Southeastern North Carolina and talk with some of the people there. If possible, I was also going to try a few simple experiments.

On advice from Professors Gerald Elkan and Gerald Van Dyke of N. C. State, I decided to use an experiment similar to the one that resulted in Fleming’s discovery of penicillin. It would verify if the mold produced any type of antibiotics which would be beneficial for infections. A sample of the mold grown on a nutrient agar medium would cause a “zone of inhibition” or a clear area around the mold culture. Bacteria would not be able to grow in this area if the mold produced any type of chemical to which they were not resistant.

On a Friday afternoon in February, Garry Hathcock and I left Raleigh heading for Brunswick County. We arrived late that after-

† This paper was written as a project in the Introduction to American Folklore course taught by Leonidas Betts at N. C. State University.



noon and checked into a Shallotte motel so that we would be able to get an early start the next morning. Garry and I decided that we should probably start by talking to several people and finding out as much about the mysterious healing waters as possible.

A hardware store located near the center of the small town seemed to be the place at which we should begin our investigation. The middle-aged owner of the store had resided in Shallotte for most of his life and seemed anxious to help us. He began by saying, "I don't know of anybody that's been cured, but I've heard some people say it helped them. Whether it helped them, I don't know, but I've heard some people say it caused a definite improvement in their conditions."

When asked if he knew any of these people he replied, "I don't know them in general. People came here from miles around, put that water in jugs, and hauled it back home. Some came from as far as the Midwest. There seemed to be some question as to whether there was some plant dying and giving off some chemical, but it had never been scientifically substantiated as far as I know."

We then crossed the street and entered a drugstore, beginning our conversation with a lady this time. She told us that she did not know very much about the water, but she could suggest some people that might be able to help us. Before she was able to finish, a second lady who overheard our conversation came up and told us how a certain Mr. Clark was healed. "He had a problem with sores on his scalp. So he got a quart jar full of this water and everyday he saturated his scalp with it, and in a month's time his scalp had started clearing up. It healed over and stayed that way the rest of his life. He got on to this healing water deal and tried it because he had tried everything else."

Later that day we found an article written in the *Wilmington Star News* (date of issue missing) that told how Toby Lewis had been healed when he was two years old. We were able to find Mrs. Lewis, his mother, and talk with her for a short time. Of all the people to whom we talked, Mrs. Lewis seemed the most confident of the water's healing power.

"I guess it healed his eyes," she said. "Anyway, they got better. His right eye stayed matted up all the time because his tear duct was stopped up. The water evidently helped because the doctors were going to have to operate. After his grandmother squirted that water in his eyes several times, it cleared up and the operation was not necessary." Toby, now twelve years old, was not there at the time and consequently we were unable to see him.



From our talks with the people in and near Shallotte, we were soon aware that each of them thought the healing water was located in a different place, from Shell Point to Shallotte's Inlet, an area of approximately six miles. Although many thought the water could be gathered anywhere between the two extremities, most believed that only the water at Shell Point and at Shallotte's Inlet was capable of the healing power.

After gathering samples of water at Shell Point, Shallotte's Inlet, and also a sample of ocean water, we began our trip back to Raleigh. A sample of the mold collected from rushes at Shallotte's Inlet was placed on an enriched media and allowed to grow. The water samples were run through sterilized filters to collect any mold that was in the water. The filters were then placed on nutrient agar plates which had been covered with the bacteria *micrococcus luteus* (a commonly used bacterial organism).

If there was anything in the water samples that would cause lysis of the bacteria, it would be evident by a zone of inhibition around the filters. The ocean water sample was used as a control to determine how large the zone of inhibition would be that is caused by the salt content of the water.

After 48 hours of growth the plates were observed. It was found that there was some inhibition of growth of the bacteria due to the salt content of the water at Shell Point and to the salt content of the ocean water sample. The sample from Shallotte's Inlet was collected in a large trench located on a small island. The water in this trench was found to be fresh water. The bacteria were not inhibited from growing around the filters, and therefore anything contained in the water did not inhibit the growth of the *micrococcus* organisms.

The small amount of inhibition in the plates from Shell Point and the ocean sample was probably due to the high salt content of the water and not because of any chemical released in the water. (The zone of inhibition was measured and found to be one millimeter around the filter.) The mold that was cultured in the nutrient agar plate gave evidence that the salt content of the water was responsible for the "miraculous cures." The mold which has been cultured within the plate was completely covered with bacteria.

A series of more intense investigations would be required before an exact statement can be made on what, if anything, is responsible for the healing power of the water. Many different types of pathogenic organisms would have to be used to make the



experiment more conclusive. A larger number of organisms are required because of the possible resistivity of some bacteria to an antibiotic. An example of this is penicillin, an effective antibiotic against gram positive bacteria, but most gram negative bacteria are resistant to penicillin.

How this particular story of the healing waters was first started or even how long ago it was first originated is a mystery. Mr. Charles Miliken told us he had first heard of the waters healing powers in the early 1930s. The *Motif-Index of Folk Literature* lists "magic water" as a source for healing wounds as a motif in an Irish myth and also in a Hindu myth (D1240 and D1503.16).

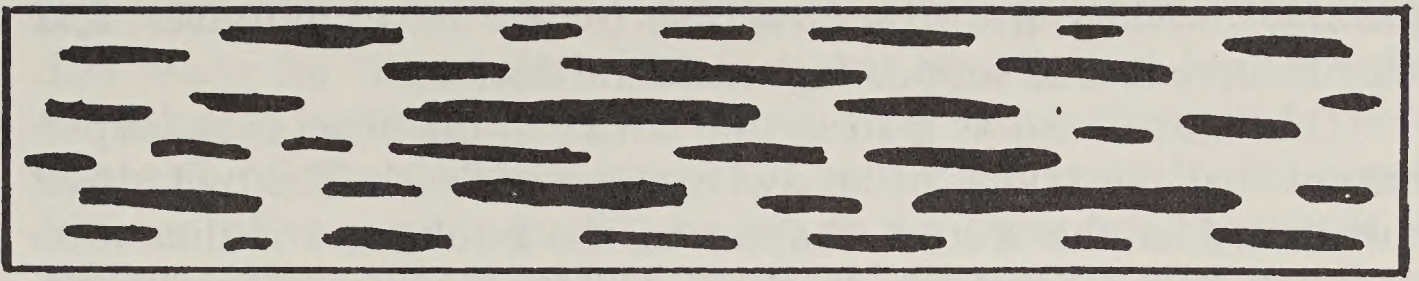
As most of the people we talked with told us, the cures are probably due to the salt contained in the water rather than to any chemical in it. Even though this may be true, there are a few of the older people around who still believe in the healing waters of Shallotte.



**LANGUAGE AT CHAPEL HILL.** Professor William S. Powell was reading some examinations in history. To one of the questions, a student wrote a good textbook-lecture answer fully and accurately, then jotted down "Nickel knowledge" and proceeded to tell more about the subject that he had picked up at his home in Wilmington. Nickel knowledge, indeed! Near the end of the course, Professor Powell tells us, he gave an hour to the cultural aspects of North Carolina, with comments on the symphony and the art museum, on Wolfe and O. Henry and Thomas Dixon, on historical publications and the Lit. and Hist. One of the questions on the examination was "What North Carolina historian became the first archivist of the United States?" As the student didn't know, he made a guess that it was Litton Hisk! Well, that old boy gets around, doesn't he?

**ABSTRACTS OF FOLKLORE STUDIES** ceased publication with the last issue of 1975. The University of Texas Press cited "rising costs and dwindling interest." Meanwhile, the annual *PMLA Bibliography* gets fatter and fatter with folklore entries. That is good, for it's all we now have, since the *Southern Folklore Quarterly* announced from the University of Florida that it was discontinuing its annual bibliography. Such a decision does not mean that interest in folklore is on the wane. On the contrary, new journals reach our desk every week. Money and time are being spent there instead of on the annuals.





## FOLK MOTIFS IN GUY OWEN'S "JOURNEY FOR JOEDEL"

by Daphne Euliss

Although Guy Owen has written four novels, including the two folkloristic "Flim-flam" novels, which capture the flavor of life in eastern North Carolina, perhaps his *Journey for Joedel* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1970) portrays most sensitively the feelings and struggles of the people living there during the Depression era. In this brief regional novel his use of North Carolina folklore enriches and authenticates his fictive world as he recreates the mood and lifestyle of the 1930s in rural North Carolina.

Owen, who now lives in Raleigh, was born in Bladen County in southeastern North Carolina. In *Journey for Joedel* he recalls many experiences and memories associated with his agrarian and small-town upbringing. As he writes of his Ellers Bend, a mythical village on the Cape Fear River, local expressions flavor the language of his characters, superstitions and tales color their beliefs, and regional customs shape their lifestyles. Throughout the novel eastern North Carolina folklore enriches, both structurally and descriptively, the story of Joedel Shaw and his family.

Twelve-year-old Joedel, the main character in the novel, is half-Indian; his mother Maddie is a member of the Lumbee tribe, and his father Clint is a white sharecropper who grows tobacco on Cap'n Jim Eller's land. Joedel and his father struggle to get their tobacco ready for sale; then they travel to the bustling market in Clayton, where the story reaches its climax. Their

† *An English major from Burlington, the author graduated from N. C. State in 1975. This paper was written as an assignment in the Introduction to American Folklore course.*



journey provides the structural base for the novel; however, folk motifs serve also as supporting structural devices.

One motif used as a structural device in the novel is the superstition that the crying of an owl is a sign of death. The owl is first mentioned in the second chapter of the book, and it thus foreshadows the subsequent death of old Cap'n Eller. Throughout, this motif recurs as a superstitious belief of Joedel's mother. Another motif used as a structural device is the Star of Bethlehem quilt. This quilt belongs to Joedel's mother and has been in her Indian family for years: consequently, the quilt and its pattern serve, not only as a religious motif, but also as a relic of her Indian heritage. Covering the tobacco that Joedel and his father take to market, this prized quilt accompanies them on their journey to Clayton.

*Journey for Joedel* depicts a people in a rural coastal region struggling through a trying period of American history, and Owen relies on folklore to help evoke a sense of time and place. By focusing on a particular locality, he brings to life the customs associated with the Indians, blacks, and whites in the Cape Fear Valley, their total immersion in their agrarian way of life, and the skill and hardships of tobacco farming before the advent of technological changes.

From the plentiful storehouse of the lore of these people, the author draws interesting and unusual customs to authenticate his novel. Joedel, for example, shares with the reader a folk hymn sung in Clayton by a black folk singer:

"This here's a needy time,  
Yeah, this here's a needy time.  
Singin' O Lord, give me one dime today,  
I been in the storm so long." (p. 150)

The experience of a Negro funeral makes a great impact on Joedel; having attended such an event, he expresses his wish for Cap'n Eller's funeral to be like the Negro funerals where people "could stand up and speak a few words" (p. 187). An unnamed character in the novel reveals racial prejudice when he tells Joedel a fragment of a folk yarn: "... if a darky owns a white mule, they make him say, 'Git up, *Mistuh* Mule' " (p. 50).

Since the novel focuses on tobacco farming and the people's dependency upon it, Owen capitalizes on the folk expressions associated with the lost art of tobacco processing: curing it until "the long veined leaves were like beaten gold" (p. 53), grading and



separating the cured leaves, and finally tying them into neat bundles ready for the market. The fact that Maddie and Joedel both tie tobacco righthanded saves their crop from the hated "pin-hooker" of the Clayton market. Cap'n Eller gives Joedel some tobacco of very poor quality to sell on his own, but because it is almost rotten, Joedel and his mother "doctor" it with snuff to conceal its real quality from the buyers. Owen also mentions the "one-horse Hoover cart" and the "horneyheads and budworms," expressions with the distinct flavor of this tobacco farming section. The excitement of traveling to the market and being a part of the local customs associated with it highlights Joedel's rural life.

Sam Eller's country store also plays an important role in the lives of the people, because, as Owen says, "it was the only remaining store in Ellers Bend" (p. 69). With its vivid "ads for Tuberosse snuff, patent remedies, and fifty-pound salt lick" (p. 69), the store takes on a personality all its own. Many of the customs described in the novel certainly serve as a historical base by which both time and place are established; the "Hoover cart" and "Hoover tobacco"—both definite references to the Depression Era—provide still another example.

In addition, one cannot overlook Owen's use of folk motifs to pepper the language and the lives of his characters. Folk similes abound as his characters describe in clear and vivid terms events from their everyday lives: Joedel describes the tobacco stems that are "as dry as fodder" (p. 22); Maddie insists that Clint is "as stubborn as a pump handle" (p. 41). These and other folk similes frequently color the speech of Owen's characters: "as cross as two sticks" (p. 119), "as big as guinea eggs" (p. 12), and "as cold as flint" (p. 120). In addition to similes, Owen's characters sprinkle their conversation with other folk expressions: moonshine becomes "tanglefoot" (p. 146); Clint threatens to "frail the tar" out of Joedel (p. 166); and he promises Cap'n Jim that they will "work it [the tobacco crop] till the cows come home" (p. 15).

An especially interesting folk superstition is revealed by Joedel's Indian Grandmother Oxendine when she cautions Joedel that the salt from urine will kill the earth (p. 24). In addition, Hutch Hutchinson, the clerk at McDougald's store, is known for removing warts by "rubbing them with both hands and mumbling some voodoo" (p. 118).

Owen's folk riddles reflect, as do the localisms and similes, the people's awareness of their immediate world. Joedel, for



example, entertains (p. 11) Sissie with the following riddles?

What goes to the water and never drinks?

A wagon.

What's red inside and full of little niggers?

A watermelon.

Round as a riddle,

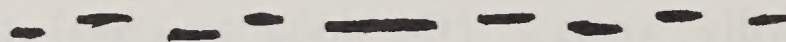
Deep as a spring,

Been the death of many a pretty thing.

A gun.

A beautiful folk tale about a white dove is also recounted in *Journey for Joedel*. (Stith Thompson *Motif-Index of Folk Literature*, E754.2.1.) It is a common belief in Ellers Bend that the Creed Duncan place is haunted. According to the local villagers, after Mr. Duncan's burial his mourners returned home to the room where he had died, and there they saw a beautiful white dove. His son opened the window, and the dove disappeared into the sky.

Throughout his novel Guy Owen uses a variety of folk motifs so unobtrusively that they seem to emerge naturally as a part of the narrative from the very hearts of his characters. Owen believes that the use of folklore *must* be organic, and certainly it is in *Journey for Joedel*, where it serves both structural and descriptive purposes. In many instances folk motifs establish the time and place of his novel. The use of folklore, Owen himself told me on April 1, 1975, is necessary "to help with the mood, to enrich the novel, and to depict more realistically the lifestyles of the people." In this particular novel he has used folklore most successfully for exactly these purposes.



**FOLKTALES TOLD AROUND THE WORLD**, edited by Richard M. Dorson (University of Chicago Press, \$17.50), is, as one would expect from Professor Dorson, a solid collection with detailed notes and sources. Tales from the United States are included along with those from European countries like Finland and Hungary, but there are also specimens from Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Peru.







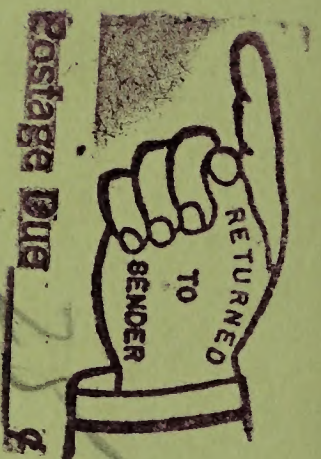






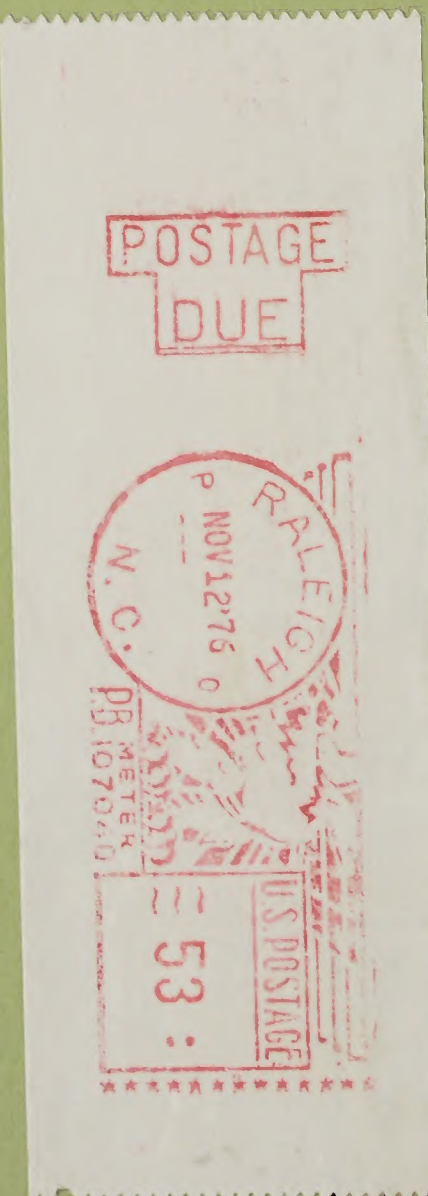


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